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RICHARD HELMS

As Director of Central Intelligence

Robert M. Hathaway
and
Russell Jack Smith

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1966-1973

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The DCI Historical Series

RICHARD HELMS

As Director of Central Intelligence 1966-1973

Robert M. Hathaway
and
Russell Jack Smith

History Staff
Center for the Study of Intelligence
Central Intelligence Agency
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~~Secret~~

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Editor's Preface

In the autumn of 1981, the Director of Central Intelligence, William J. Casey, proposed that the recently reestablished History Staff undertake a history of the tenure of his distinguished predecessor, Richard Helms. On taking office earlier that year, Director Casey had read and found useful previous History Staff studies of two former DCIs, Walter Bedell Smith by Ludwell Montague (1971), and Allen Dulles by Wayne Jackson (1973). Mr. Casey asked the late John Bross, a wartime OSS colleague who was then serving as his special assistant, to arrange for this study with the new Chief of the History Staff—the present writer—who had joined CIA in August 1981. John Bross arranged meetings with Richard Helms and R. Jack Smith (who had served as Helms's Deputy Director for Intelligence) to plan such a study.

John Bross outlined a study whose chapters would each focus on a topic that had demanded Richard Helms's special attention as DCI. Although the chapter topics that Bross proposed, with Helms's approval, have undergone some evolution, the work as now completed largely follows Bross's original outline. From the outset it has been organized as a topical study and not as a comprehensive narrative history of Richard Helms's six and a half years as DCI. This work has little to say, for example, about the new and growing Directorate of Science and Technology (DS&T). For most of Helms's tenure the DS&T was led by Carl Duckett, to whom Helms delegated very large authority in an area that was almost entirely outside his own experience and expertise. Although the DS&T initiated no new overhead reconnaissance projects while Helms was DCI, several important projects that were already under way came into service; excellent accounts of these and other DS&T achievements in this period can be found in two top-secret codeword studies, [redacted] six-volume *The Directorate for Science and Technology, 1962-1970* (History Staff, 1972) and Donald Welzenbach's *History of the Directorate of Science and Technology, 1970-1983* (DS&T, 1987).

Although initially each chapter was to be written by a former officer who had personal knowledge of its topic, the work as approved in 1982 and now completed divides the chapters between former DDI Jack Smith and Robert Hathaway of the History Staff. As these authors produced draft chapters, it became evident that their contributions differed substantially in documentation, style, and point of view. Jack Smith, who had his own experience and recollections of the period, relied more heavily on interviews with his former chief, Richard Helms, and his colleagues, than on

the documentary record. Moreover, he not surprisingly reveals strong views on some of the issues he treats. Robert Hathaway, who joined CIA and the History Staff in 1982 as a professional historian, made extensive use of the Agency's records in addition to his interviews of Mr. Helms and the officers who served under him. The present writer, as the editor responsible for preparing this work for publication, has undertaken to shape the two sets of draft chapters into a single cohesive study, while preserving in each chapter as far as possible the principal author's style, structure, and interpretation. Although each chapter's original author is noted under its title, the reader should be aware that the editor has subjected all the original drafts to considerable revision, including deputy chief historian Mary McAuliffe's work on chapters 8 and 9 and staff historian Nicholas Cullather's revision of chapters 2 and 3.

Russell Jack Smith, the principal author of four of the work's nine chapters, took his B.A. from Miami University of Ohio, received a Ph.D. in English literature from Cornell University in 1941, and taught at Williams College before joining the Office of Strategic Services in 1945. After the war he continued his intelligence career in the Central Intelligence Group and Central Intelligence Agency and became Deputy Director for Intelligence in 1966.

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[redacted] he retired in 1974. In his well-received memoirs, *The Unknown CIA: My Three Decades With the Agency* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989), Jack Smith offers more personal accounts of a number of the issues and events he treats in this present study.

Robert M. Hathaway, the principal author of five of the work's chapters, took B.A. and M.A. degrees from Wake Forest University and his Ph.D. in history at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in 1976. After service in the US Army, he taught at Middlebury College and Barnard College of Columbia University before joining CIA and the History Staff in 1982. He left CIA in late 1986 to join the professional staff of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee. His books include *Ambiguous Partnership: Britain and America 1944-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), which won the 1981 Truman Book Award, and *Great Britain and the United States: Special Relations Since World War II* (Boston: Twayne, 1990).

Some acknowledgements and thanks are in order. I shall always be grateful for the friendship and counsel of John Bross, who launched the study, helped it on its way, and maintained a keen interest in it right up to the time of his death in October 1990. Richard Helms himself has been extraordinarily helpful and generous in making time for the many interviews the study required. This volume has been a long time in preparation, and we thank him for his patience. We are also grateful to all those in the History Staff, Office of Current Production and Analytic Support, and Printing and Photography Group who helped put this volume into print.

Finally, I should note that while this is an official publication of the CIA History Staff, the views expressed—as in all our works—are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the CIA.

J. Kenneth McDonald
Chief Historian

June 1993

Chapter 1

Relations With the White House

Robert M. Hathaway

In practical terms a Director of Central Intelligence has one and only one boss: the President of the United States. Certainly a DCI has to respond to the concerns of other Washington players as well: the Secretaries of State and Defense, the President's National Security Advisor, the members of the US intelligence community, and strategically placed legislators in the Congress. But compared to his relations with the occupant of the Oval Office, his ties to all others pale into insignificance. A DCI in frequent contact with and fully supported by his President will have few equals in Washington in his influence on the policymaking process. Conversely, a Director lacking entry into the innermost circles of the White House quickly finds himself—no matter how well-informed his sources or accurate his intelligence—isolated from the administration's central decisions. His warnings and advice will fall unnoticed into the vast wastebin of rejected and ignored memorandums Washington daily spews out.

As Director of Central Intelligence, Richard Helms served under two of the most complex and controversial Presidents in the nation's history—Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon.

In the case of Johnson, Helms was dealing with a longtime member of the Washington political establishment who was also monumentally insecure within that establishment. One of the most effective majority leaders ever to boss the United States Senate, Johnson entered the White House after John Kennedy's assassination, determined to legislate a program of reform that would rival in scope Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Yet, much against his will, he found himself swept up in a conflagration far from American shores, a war that would eventually doom his Great Society and drive him out of the White House.

His successor was a man even more beset by inner demons. Historians will long puzzle over Richard Nixon's psychological makeup, but it is arguable that no more tortured individual had entered the White House in the two hundred years of the nation's existence. Meanspirited and

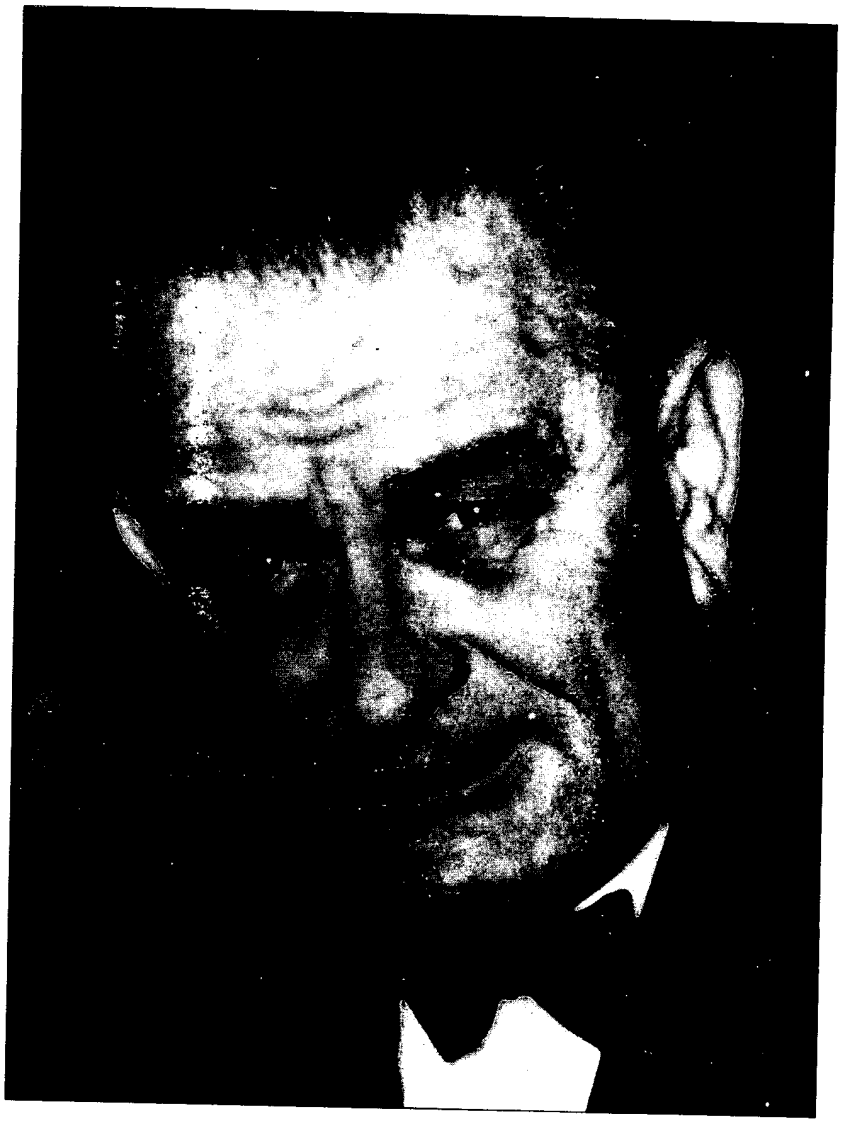
withdrawn, an unlovable man who desperately craved acceptance, Nixon—even more than Lyndon Johnson—suspected those around him of secretly laughing at him. Neither man proved an easy boss to work for. Both men came to build around themselves a protective shield of advisers to filter out unwelcome or unwanted views. And yet in many respects Richard Helms's experiences with each were stark opposites. The first of these Presidents bestowed on Helms a position of trust and influence, while the second usually regarded Helms with the distrust the besieged accords someone on the other side of the ramparts.

Richard Helms and Lyndon Johnson

According to Richard Helms, his success with President Johnson largely arose out of one dramatic coup. For the first three and a half years of his presidency Johnson had never found much use for intelligence. His relations with DCI John McCone, whom he had inherited from Kennedy, gradually soured to the point where McCone found resignation preferable to being ignored. McCone's successor, retired VAdm. William Raborn, never came close to reestablishing a strong voice for the DCI in the White House. Within months of his appointment, the White House and others recognized that selecting Raborn as DCI had been a mistake, and in June 1966 he was replaced by Helms. In his first year, Helms also failed to make much of an impression on President Johnson, who was increasingly overburdened by domestic controversy and overseas crisis.

All this changed in late May and early June 1967, just as Helms was completing his first year as Director. CIA successes just before and during Israel's Six-Day War dramatically enhanced the prestige of the Agency—and of its Director—in the eyes of President Johnson. The details of this episode are described elsewhere in this study's examination of CIA's relations with Israel while Helms was DCI. Suffice it to say here that some wonderfully accurate CIA prognostications concerning the timing, duration, and outcome of the 1967 war swept Helms into Lyndon Johnson's inner circle of advisers, where he remained for the rest of Johnson's term of office.

In Lyndon Johnson's White House, membership in the Presidential inner circle meant joining in the Tuesday luncheons, and, for the balance of the Johnson presidency, Helms attended these functions regularly. As Helms describes it, his role at these luncheons—Johnson's personal device



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President Lyndon B. Johnson

for gathering about him the people in whom he had confidence—was to provide corrective intelligence information and judgments whenever one ofthe other participants appeared to get off track:

> He never said this to me, but I got the distinct impression that the reason he valued my presence was that I kept the game honest. When Rusk would go way out on some policy, or McNamara would advocate X, or Earle Wheeler, the Chairman of the JCS, would be too upfield, then I would come in and say, "This is the way *we* understand it, and the facts are as follows. . . ." And I did this constantly. So it was a useful role for him. There was no doubt about it. I went to Guam [with President Johnson]; I went to God-knows-where on these various conferences on Vietnam. And when I'd get there, there wasn't a hell of a lot of work to do, but he just liked having me around, sitting there.[1]

Sitting there, keeping the game honest: this was an ideal situation for an intelligence officer, to sit beside the President of the United States with an open invitation to speak up whenever facts or judgments contrary to the best available intelligence made their appearance.

Richard Helms was extremely careful not to abuse this position of trust, not to overstep his bounds as an intelligence officer. He went to considerable lengths to avoid being involved in the policy debate, and, regardless of his personal opinions, he refrained from advocating one policy over another unless directly asked by the President (as sometimes occurred). He did this not out of mere caution or self-protection, but rather out of his own deep convictions about the proper role of intelligence. "I am a believer that the Director of Central Intelligence, as the principal intelligence officer to the President, should not be involved in foreign policy except to the extent that the presentation of any intelligence material to a President is in itself a type of policy recommendation," he has explained. "I don't think it's helpful to a President to have *all* the people surrounding him involved in policy issues."[2]

Helms had arrived at this conviction in part by observing the less restrained performance of John McCone. "McCone believed that he could wear two hats. One hat was as Director of the Agency and the presenter of intelligence information that the Agency produced. The other, that he could sit at meetings and help to formulate the policy that the administration ought to follow," Helms recalls. "I did not agree with that," he laconically

[1]Richard M. Helms, interview by R. J. Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 21 April 1982 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 21 April 1982) (SECRET). Recordings, transcripts, and notes for the interviews conducted for this study are on file in the CIA History Staff office.
[2]Richard M. Helms, interview by R. J. Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 3 June 1982 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 3 June 1982) (SECRET).

adds. Instead, he remained silent except when one of the policy officers strayed beyond the limits of reality as indicated by Agency information and judgment. He felt that he could perform a more useful role

> by seeing to it that the Secretary of State or Defense, or whoever was advocating whatever they were advocating, stayed with the acceptable limits of the facts as we knew them, the parameters of events that had transpired. This was a useful function to perform for the President. Because every Cabinet officer, in advocating policies, whether the President's policy or not, is constantly tempted to overdrive and to oversell, to overpersuade. Often the degree to which this is being done gets lost sight of. I figure that the intelligence chief has a role to play in keeping these things in perspective, keeping the perceptions as accurate and as objective as possible.[3]

His membership in the White House inner coterie did not necessarily shield Richard Helms from presidential disapproval on occasion. These were difficult, contentious times. The war in Vietnam produced sharp divisions of opinion and raised sensitivities to adverse public opinion to very high levels. For instance, Lyndon Johnson found it painful to have figures of the civilian casualties caused by US bombing publicly aired. Once, a senior Agency officer, while briefing the Senate Armed Services Committee, was asked a question out of the blue about casualties inflicted on North Vietnam's civilian population during USAF bombing attacks. The CIA officer provided such figures as he could. Several days later Helms happened to be walking through the White House arcade between the Mansion and the President's Oval Office. Lyndon Johnson, walking alongside, took Helms by the arm and said in a fatherly tone, "Now, if you feel any urge to go up and testify in Congress on this whole question of civilian casualties in Vietnam, I just hope you'll pass by and have a drink with me the afternoon before." Helms, of course, promised he would. He later said of the incident, "This was his way of conveying a message to me that he wanted to have something to say about this. It was done pointedly but not vociferously."[4] At his morning meeting the next day, Helms told the DDI of the President's sensitivity to North Vietnamese civilian casualty figures and instructed all elements in the Agency to avoid the subject.[5] Although one can understand the DCI's wish to accommodate the President, in retrospect one must wonder whether the Agency could legitimately avoid or ignore evidence of civilian casualties in reporting on the war in Vietnam.

Lyndon Johnson was not always so gentle, and on two occasions in the first month that Helms was DCI the President had expressed his disapproval of certain CIA actions in loud, wrathful tones. "He was very

[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] Morning Meeting Minutes, 31 January 1967.

vociferous with me and I was very vociferous right back," Helms later recalled, and continued:

> After that, I never had a vociferous conversation with President Johnson again. I think he figured that taking me on that way was not very useful, and that if he wanted to talk to me he did it differently. From then on, we never had any noisy words with each other . . . no shouting back and forth.[6]

While it is easy to picture a vociferous President Johnson, it is difficult to imagine the austere and controlled Richard Helms shouting back. Nevertheless, these exchanges in the summer of 1966, combined with Helms's performance during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, evidently established the President's confidence and respect in him as DCI. Helms emphasizes that after the initial altercations his relationship with Johnson was excellent: "He didn't badger me; I was well treated by him."[7]

Given Johnson's penchant for informal policy discussions such as the Tuesday luncheons, and his tendency to buttonhole opponents and urge them to "sit down and reason together awhile," one might assume that he preferred to receive his intelligence information through oral briefings. Richard Helms quickly discovered, in part by observing John McCone as DCI, that this was not true. When Johnson first became President, McCone had started a program of daily briefings. As Helms remembers it, Johnson "finally got bored, closed the door, and that was the end. He just didn't want to do it any more. You couldn't *make* him do it any more." For Helms the implications were obvious. "This one-on-one, that people who live in academia hold to be so important, does not necessarily achieve your objective. You either adjust your production to the man you have in office or you're going to miss the train."[8]

Thus, while President Johnson found informal discussion within small groups highly useful, he shied away from formal presentations and prolonged briefings. It was clear to Helms that "Johnson was much better at reading documents. The way to get his attention was to present a well-reasoned, well-written piece of paper."[9] Helms enjoyed his first real success with Johnson largely through the Board of National Estimates' short analysis controverting an alarmist Israeli intelligence estimate in May 1967. This success encouraged Helms to send—as often as several times a week—brief memorandums containing information pertinent to the President's current concerns. Lyndon Johnson was a voracious reader who kept several news tickers operating just outside his office door, regularly tearing off long swatches to scan, and he found himself well served by the

[6]Helms interview, 3 June 1982.
[7]*Ibid.*
[8]*Ibid.*
[9]*Ibid.*

DCI's steady flow of brief, sharply pointed pieces. They provided a backdrop and written basis for the comments Helms made "to keep the game honest" during informal policy meetings.

These same presidential preferences dictated Helms's modus operandi at National Security Council meetings. During the Eisenhower administration, when many NSC customs and practices were institutionalized, the Director of Central Intelligence, though not a statutory member of the body, became a regular participant in its deliberations. Allen Dulles would always present an intelligence briefing and relished these opportunities to intermingle juicy tidbits of intelligence with more solid substantive material. Under John F. Kennedy, National Security Council meetings were mostly formal events, held only sporadically. When they were held, John McCone usually gave a sober account of the world's problems as seen through the eyes of CIA and its Director.

Richard Helms attempted to carry on this tradition once he became DCI by presenting a survey of the world in a 10-to-15-minute briefing. He found that with Lyndon Johnson this was a mistake.

> With President Johnson . . . I finally came to the conclusion that what I had to say I should get into the first 60, or at least 120 seconds, that I had on my feet. Because after that he was pushing buttons for coffee or Fresca, or talking to Rusk, or talking to McNamara, or whispering here or whispering there. I had lost my principal audience.[10]

The adjustment made for Johnson consisted of a steady stream of short, crisp papers combined with attendance at the Tuesday luncheons.

One must be careful not to place too rosy a glow on the relationship between Helms and Johnson. Many commentators have noted the inherent conflict between sophisticated intelligence, which is apt to see many sides to a question, and the needs of decisionmakers, who must often ignore shadings and ambiguities in deciding upon a single course of action. The last thing a policymaker wishes to hear is why his preferred course of action may not work, but that is precisely the service timely intelligence often provides. Lyndon Johnson has left us with a memorable quotation with respect to this spoiling role intelligence often plays. "Policy making is like milking a fat cow," the President remarked on one occasion. "You see the milk coming out, you press more and the milk bubbles and flows, and just as the bucket is full, the cow with its tail whips the bucket and all is spilled. That's what CIA does to policy making."[11]

During the Johnson years, CIA played the cow's tail repeatedly on matters pertaining to the war in Southeast Asia. Helms's Agency again and again produced intelligence analyses that conflicted with the optimistic line

[10] *Ibid.*
[11] Henry Brandon, *The Retreat of American Power* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 103.

the White House took on the progress of the war. Johnson's response was not to change course, but to ignore what his intelligence experts were telling him. As administration policy became more and more beleaguered, the White House decisionmaking process became an exceptionally closed one—with discouraging intelligence reports and analyses excluded from any role in policymaking. So while it is undoubtedly true that Johnson found it useful to have Helms close at hand, this does not mean that the White House always accorded the products of Helms's Agency the respect or voice this might imply. In certain important respects, most notably on matters pertaining to the war in Indochina, Johnson seems to have divorced Helms from the CIA, valuing the former even as he chose to ignore the latter.

Richard Helms and Richard Nixon

Compared to what followed, however, the Johnson years seem almost a golden era of President-DCI, White House–CIA relations. A warning that this favorable situation would soon end was sounded on 31 March 1968 when President Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection. Helms sent a personal note to LBJ expressing his keen regret over this decision.

Immediately after Richard Nixon's electoral triumph in November 1968, Johnson called Helms to the White House to meet the President-elect. At this meeting LBJ informed his DCI that starting immediately Helms was to make CIA's entire output of reporting and analysis—"everything that I get"—available to Nixon. Since the Nixon staff had decided to remain at its campaign headquarters at the Pierre Hotel in New York until Inauguration Day, CIA had to set up a secure Agency outpost where the ultrasensitive daily and weekly periodicals as well as numerous codeword studies could be transmitted electronically. Helms dispatched a team to New York and over the weekend these officers established a vaulted, secure area in the basement of the American Bible Society Building a short distance from the Pierre Hotel. On the following Monday CIA materials began to flow to New York for the use of President-elect Nixon and National Security Assistant-designate Henry Kissinger.[12]

Even before Nixon's inauguration, Helms received disturbing indications that his would be a far less favored position under the new President than it had been under Johnson. Early presidential ideas on organizing the national security function envisioned excluding the DCI from National

[12]Kissinger's full title was Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

AP/WIDE WORLD

President Richard M. Nixon

Security Council meetings. Nixon backed away from this extreme position before it was implemented, when the new Secretary of Defense, Mel Laird, interceded on Helms's behalf. Nevertheless, in the early days of his administration Nixon allowed Helms to attend NSC meetings only to offer factual briefings, after which he excused the DCI from the room. The awkwardness of this situation was immediately obvious in the NSC, and after six weeks or so the DCI was permitted to remain throughout the meeting.

Henry Kissinger's memoirs suggest one reason behind the President's frontal assault upon Helms's position within the decisionmaking apparatus. Nixon brought to the presidency, Kissinger has written, a belief that the CIA was "a refuge of Ivy League intellectuals opposed to him." A man prone to see enemies everywhere, Nixon blamed his 1960 defeat for the presidency on allegedly inaccurate and politically motivated CIA estimates that the Soviets had achieved strategic superiority over the United States during the Eisenhower years when Nixon served as Vice President; this was, of course, the so-called missile gap. Nixon was convinced that

Agency liberals, behind a facade of analytical objectivity, were usually pushing their own agenda—a far Left, essentially defeatist set of views incompatible with those held by the silent majority of Middle America, which he had adopted (or created) as his constituency. As for Helms, Kissinger reports, the new President felt ill at ease with the DCI, "since he suspected that Helms was well liked by the liberal Georgetown social set," the very "establishment" Nixon professed to scorn.[13]

Why did Nixon, given these prejudices, decide to keep Helms as DCI? The former President has never explained his reasoning, but the answer may partly lie with the extremely narrow margin of his 1968 presidential victory. Given the absence of any real mandate, he almost certainly felt a need to move cautiously. With Helms commanding widespread and bipartisan respect in Washington, there were no compelling reasons, nor any importunate alternative candidates, to justify or require a change. In addition, the practice of each new President appointing his own Director of Central Intelligence had not yet been established in 1969; both Kennedy and Johnson had retained DCIs selected by their predecessors. Finally, Nixon's bias was not so much against Helms as against the Agency he ran.

Although he kept his job, Helms realized immediately that his Agency was in for some rough sledding. "It was bound to be a rocky period with Richard Nixon as President, given the fact that he held the Agency responsible for his defeat in 1960," the former DCI would later say. "And he never forgot that. He had a barb out for the Agency all the time." Nixon initially concentrated his fire on the National Intelligence Estimates, evidently regarding them as the chief vehicle for CIA animosity. And his memory was long. From the early days of his administration, Helms recalls, the President singled out for criticism Estimates from the 1950s, when he was Eisenhower's Vice President. "He would constantly, in National Security Council meetings, pick on the Agency for not having properly judged what the Soviets were going to do with various kinds of weaponry . . . he would make nasty remarks about this and say this had to be sharpened up. The Agency had to understand it had to do a better job and so on." Helms's concluding remarks are arresting: "Dealing with him was tough, and it seems to me that the fact I ended up with my head on my shoulders after four years of working with him is not the least achievement of my life."[14]

Nor were the temperament and personal style of Richard Nixon the only obstacles Helms faced under the new regime. The new President surrounded himself with a staff that combined an intensely personal loyalty to

[13]Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), pp. 11, 36.
[14]Helms interview, 21 April 1982.

its boss with a vindictive capacity for seeing presidential adversaries in every quarter. Helms thinks it likely that personalities played a role in the uncomfortable situation in which he found himself:

> To this day, I obviously don't have any way of judging what *my* being Director had to do with this one way or the other. Because, after all, Nixon reappointed me. But I was no man for [presidential assistants] Ehrlichman or Haldeman. I mean, they didn't like the appointment in the first place. So there was an element that was anti-Helms. I mean, it didn't manifest itself with knives in my back, particularly, but, you know, "this guy's not *for* it."[15]

CIA was not the only agency to notice a marked change once the Nixon team replaced Johnson's. The revelations in the Watergate hearings have made it abundantly clear that President Nixon viewed most of the governmental institutions he inherited from his predecessor with keen distrust. The new administration brought to the daily operation of the government an us-against-them approach. The White House seemed to regard the entire governmental bureaucracy as just another locus of political partisanship, necessitating tighter control and greater centralization within the small group of officials close to the President.

This was particularly true in the realm of national security policy, where Kissinger moved quickly to establish a strong National Security Council staff under his leadership. Moreover, he brought a new dimension to the job of Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. Both his immediate predecessors, McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow—presidential assistants to Kennedy and Johnson—were men of broad understanding and high intelligence. Bundy and Rostow, however, had confined themselves to subordinate roles in national security affairs, primarily making certain that the President was kept thoroughly informed on key issues by channeling the requisite information to him. Kissinger, a man of powerful intellect with an ego to match, injected himself far more directly into the actual policymaking process. The former professor turned National Security Assistant imposed a strict methodology upon the formulation of policy and the intelligence to support it. For the intelligence community this entailed a rigidly formalistic system designed to generate multiple policy options for White House use. In Kissinger's scheme of things, CIA was demoted from its traditional position as the primary governmental source for objective reporting and analysis on international affairs and relegated to being merely another contender for White House attention.

Even though Kissinger himself was very critical of national estimates, in Helms's view Nixon's "carping" heightened this disdain. "So estimating was hardly something that he wanted to be a champion for," Helms later observed of Kissinger. "[T]hese two men tended to work on

[15] *Ibid.*

each other with respect to the estimating process of the Agency. And Kissinger, feeling that Nixon didn't regard the Estimates as being very good, didn't pay very much attention to them himself." Moreover, he had a tendency to be selective in the way he read intelligence. All this, Helms came to feel, was

> part of Kissinger's tactics. The more you keep people off balance, the more you keep the pressure on, the more he felt they'd work harder or be more careful or do a better job or something. So that getting any praise out of Kissinger for any particular thing was—well, it virtually never happened. He didn't have any commendations to hand around to anybody.[16]

The result, Helms has noted, was a period when Agency analysis and estimating rather consistently encountered heavy weather in the White House.

In other respects as well, Nixon was quite unlike the gregarious Johnson. Opportunities for informal meetings with the President were few, and direct substantive exchange between Nixon and Helms quite meager. Most presidential foreign policy discussions took place in closed Oval Office sessions with Henry Kissinger and Nixon the only participants. In contrast to LBJ, Nixon chose not to rely on his Director of Central Intelligence to keep the facts straight and the judgments sound. Except for Kissinger, who quickly established a secure relationship with the President in the realm of national security affairs, the Nixon White House inner circle consisted exclusively of presidential campaign lieutenants and political partisans.

Like LBJ, however, Nixon preferred to receive his intelligence information through the printed word. Nixon "took it in better through the eye," Helms recalls. In NSC meetings, he "would sit there for longer briefings—but after the first five minutes his mind would start to wander, too, unless something came up that he was particularly interested in. So one has to adjust to these things."[17] Thus the question became how to get the important documents to Nixon's desk. The problem was made considerably more difficult by the system Kissinger established with his NSC staff—with President Nixon's approval—for filtering the flow of information to the Oval Office. At the outset of the Nixon administration, Helms attempted to send to Nixon, as he had to Johnson, a steady flow of short pieces containing intelligence pertinent to ongoing events. But since Nixon felt no particular need for the type of in-depth CIA reports and studies the Agency had provided for Johnson, Helms was soon reduced to sending Kissinger those items he felt contained especially pertinent information, with a note politely suggesting that the information be passed to the

[16]*Ibid.*
[17]Helms interview, 3 June 1982.

President. In short, direct access to the President for timely and sensitive information from his principal intelligence officer was closed off during the Nixon administration.

The record of CIA intelligence support during the Johnson and Nixon administrations amply illustrates that it is the President himself who determines how effective that support can be. His attitudes, his work habits, his receptivity to objective judgment whether favorable or unfavorable to his hopes and plans—these are the essential elements in determining how much and how well his intelligence organizations can help him. Richard Helms well understood this point:

> Each President has to be dealt with by a Director according to his personality and according to his way of doing business. To have [someone] say that the Director's relationship with the President should be X, Y, or Z is absolutely worthless. . . . There is no way that these things can be legislated or controlled. Every President is going to do his business the way he wants to do it. You say, "Well, he should discipline himself," but they never do. They do it exactly the way they want to do it.[18]

The single-most-important thing a DCI must have to ensure maximum impact and effectiveness is access to the President. But here again, such access depends entirely on the principal occupant of the White House. "Most people miss the point about the United States Government," Helms has remarked:

> The Cabinet and all the principal [posts] are appointive jobs; they are *all* appointive. . . . [And] every single one of those fellows has got to be someone the President can get along with. If the President doesn't get along with him, then he'll fade away.[19]

Richard Helms did not fade away, but neither was he able to use CIA intelligence to serve President Nixon as well as he might have.

The contrast between the relationship Helms and CIA enjoyed with Lyndon Johnson and their relationship with Richard Nixon underscores this point. The policy problems the two Presidents faced, and the intelligence CIA could provide to help them deal with those problems, were not significantly different in kind or quality. Yet, measured by the effective assistance CIA was permitted to offer, the contrast is stark. In the atmosphere of the Johnson administration, CIA under Richard Helms was a trusted, competent ally that was accorded the large scope to do its job. The Nixon administration, on the other hand, tended to see the Helms CIA as a suspect, erratic entity that required constant scrutiny to ensure that it acted in the interests of the White House rather than its own. The record makes it clear: CIA intelligence was only as useful as the President permitted it to be.

[18] *Ibid.*
[19] *Ibid.*

MHCHAOS: CIA and the Antiwar Movement

Every President has his special areas of personal interest or concern. John Kennedy, for instance, possessed strong feelings about the dangers posed by nuclear proliferation. More recent Presidents have displayed an intense interest in such issues as international technology transfers, arms control verification, and state-sponsored terrorism. The wise Director of Central Intelligence will identify these areas of a President's interest and ensure that his Agency makes a special effort to cover them well. For Richard Helms, this meant allotting an enormous share of the Agency's resources to the problem of Indochina. It also dictated a sudden spurt of effort in Chile (as this study explores elsewhere in some detail), once Nixon in 1970 focused on the likelihood that the Marxist Salvador Allende would be elected President. And under both Johnson and Nixon, it meant continuing attention to the problem of domestic dissent, particularly in its international context. Both Presidents were dismayed by the extent to which their policies had encountered domestic opposition; both allowed themselves to believe that foreign machinations lay behind this opposition. And both placed on Helms's CIA demands that, at least in retrospect, raised troubling questions about how the Agency should respond to questionable Presidential directives.

Few Clandestine Services activities brought Richard Helms more criticism and censure than the operation bearing the cryptonym MHCHAOS, by which CIA—at President Johnson's direction—tried to discover whether the movement opposing the Vietnam war was funded or directed from abroad. Within the Agency, resistance to the program was widespread and surfaced almost as soon as awareness of its existence seeped into middle management and the working level. Outside CIA, the series of investigations of the Agency that marked the mid-1970s set off a storm of protests by the press and civil liberties groups. CIA was exceeding the range of its legal charter, the critics charged, by operating intelligence collection activities within the United States against US citizens. Some of this censure rested upon exaggeration and distortion. The investigations of the 1970s established, however, that CIA was by no means entirely innocent of the allegations lodged against it.

In the summer of 1967, as racial unrest and antiwar sentiment escalated around the country, officials in the Johnson administration cast about for some explanation of the burgeoning dissident movement. President Johnson found it impossible to believe that American youths would, without external provocation, indulge in the riotous actions currently disrupting many of the nation's cities and campuses. Convinced that foreign agents, almost certainly Communists, were funding and directing these

activities, he wanted CIA to obtain for him the positive proof that he was certain existed. Helms recalls that this was "an abiding concern" on the President's part:

> Neither he nor the Vice President, Hubert Humphrey, could figure out why such turmoil, if there wasn't some foreign element or some foreign money behind it, and this was sort of a plea, "Can't you fellows find out what's going on here? Look at these people in the streets; we can't imagine that good Americans do things like this." . . . He was *very* concerned about this, and I don't think that anybody that was in National Security Council meetings with him had any doubt that he was very worried about what kind of foreign influence was in the antiwar movement and was talking about it constantly and couldn't understand why people couldn't find the evidence.[20]

Richard Helms was aware from the outset that intelligence activities directed in any way against domestic American groups would require the Agency to work close to the line of its charter. He, nonetheless, believed that the President's request for information was proper, and that the Agency could stay within the range of authorized activities while responding to this request. "That the target, the objective, was a legitimate one, I think goes without saying," he would later explain. "I mean, this was part of the Agency's job, that if foreigners were attempting to cause trouble in the United States, the Agency certainly had its part in trying to find out who these foreign countries were, what entities were involved, and why they were doing this and *how*. Naturally, it was up to the FBI to monitor events within the United States. But, Helms added, "It was incumbent upon the Agency to do its best *outside* to find out the origins of this antiwar movement, where the money was coming from and how it was being spent."[21]

And if their investigations should lead Agency officers across that line separating foreign from domestic activities? "I took a conscious decision at the time this came up," Helms relates. As the former DCI recalls it, one of his subordinates approached him with the argument that, if CIA were going to obtain "a rounded picture," its investigations needed to be comprehensive. "It really doesn't make much sense to cut off the legs and just leave the torso wandering around," the officer argued. "So let's put the whole thing together and take whatever chances go with this because it does seem to be so important." Pressured by what the Rockefeller Commission later termed "continuing and insistent requests from the White House," Helms bought this reasoning.[22]

[20]Richard M. Helms, interview by R. J. Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 22 June 1983 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 22 June 1983) (Secret).
[21]*Ibid.*
[22]*Ibid.*; US Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States, *Report to the President* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1975) (hereafter cited as Rockefeller Commission), p. 131. President Ford appointed this Commission in 1975 to look into allegations of domestic CIA activities.

The DCI's first move, in August 1967, was to set up within the Counterintelligence Staff a new unit called the Special Operations Group (SOG), and to name Richard Ober its head. The group's sole purpose, Helms instructed Ober, was to determine if domestic political dissidents, including student antiwar protesters, were receiving foreign support. "I established this unit," Helms later explained, "because it seemed to me that since this was a high priority in the eyes of the President, that it should be a high priority in the Agency." Ober's job was to examine all material, "from all over the world, from whatever source that we could find," to see what was behind the nationwide disorders.[23]

Over the next few years, the Special Operations Group expanded steadily, attaining a staff of [redacted] by 1971. In pursuing its leads, the group collected information on thousands of domestic dissidents, eventually opening subject files on 7,200 American citizens and 6,000 political organizations. The greatest bulk of these files came from the FBI and contained the usual melange of FBI reporting, which tended to be heavy on hearsay, unevaluated rumor, and indirect information. In all, more than 300,000 names from FBI files were placed in the SOG computer system.[24] Most of these names, later inquiries were to demonstrate, belonged to persons representing no security risk whatever.

The first fruit of this special group emerged in November 1967, following a large demonstration outside the Pentagon the previous month, and was entitled "International Connections of the U.S. Peace Movement." Although the Directorate of Intelligence's (DI) Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) did the actual writing, Ober's researchers provided nearly all the information for the report. Given President Johnson's expectations, the conclusions of the paper must have been a crashing disappointment. The gist of the report was that CIA could turn up little evidence of foreign involvement in the peace movement and no indications of significant foreign financial support. This conclusion set the pattern for succeeding studies on this subject: if American antiwar groups were directed or controlled by foreign elements, CIA could not find evidence of it.

Because of the intense interest of Lyndon Johnson—a man capable of titanic intensity—Richard Helms might have expected a harsh reaction to this report. It did not come. But at the same time the administration made it clear that the Agency was to continue its explorations along these lines. Ober's staff intensified its efforts, producing a succession of studies on student radicalism, black activists, and the peace movement. None was able to point to specific foreign controls. In September 1968, in response to steadily mounting official concern as antiwar demonstrations grew in number and violence, OCI produced a more ambitious study titled "Restless

[23]Helms interview, 22 June 1983.
[24]Rockefeller Commission, p. 23.

Youth." Similar disorders had occurred in Europe, and this coincidence did nothing to allay White House suspicions regarding foreign incitement in the US. "Restless Youth" nevertheless concluded, like its predecessors, that American student radicalism stemmed from domestic social and political alienation, not from foreign influence.

Such an answer pleased neither Lyndon Johnson, who was convinced of its opposite, nor Richard Nixon, whose beliefs in this regard paralleled Johnson's, nor Richard Helms, who wished to provide what was wanted—if it were true and could be found. Helms would subsequently downplay the pressures on him to find convincing proof of foreign backing, but they were real all the same. Even so, his subordinates report that the DCI refrained from making unreasonable demands on them. As Richard Ober says, "At no time did Dick Helms ever put any pressure on me to come up with the answer the President wanted. He accepted what I brought him and made no effort to influence the analysis."[25]

This is a point of very considerable significance, one that speaks to the integrity of the Agency and its officers, and even more to the integrity of its Director, who was feeling the presidential heat day after day. It is a point that seems generally to have been missed by the Agency's critics. Despite very strong pressures, the Agency stuck to its guns. It did not wiggle out by stringing together hearsay and innuendo in a story that would both provide an answer pleasing to the White House and impugn the antiwar movement as Communist inspired. Instead, Agency officers sifted and sorted reports with professional thoroughness, searching for credible evidence. Finding none, they reported their conclusions without apology and informed the White House that the movement could not be dismissed as a Communist ploy.

The growth of Ober's staff, made necessary by the efforts of Agency overseas stations to report any scrap of information that might prove useful, caused increased concern on Helms's part over the security of the operation, as did the SOG's inevitable ventures into grey areas of the Agency's charter. The DCI therefore set up the cryptonym MHCHAOS for all traffic to and from the Ober group and clamped very tight security on that traffic. Contrary to the fantasies of Agency critics, the cryptonym CHAOS has no symbolic significance; it was merely the next crypt in the system. Helms also made certain that those who received CIA reports detailing American student activities were made aware of the extraordinary sensitivity of these studies.

Apart from these rigorous security precautions, Richard Helms felt no great concern about the way MHCHAOS operations were conducted. By this time, one modus operandi for getting better information was to use

[25]Richard Ober, interview by R. J. Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 14 July 1983 (hereafter cited as Ober interview, 14 July 1983) (SECRET).

young Americans already involved in the domestic antiwar movement, who could be trained for infiltration of overseas peace groups. Recruiting young Americans in this country for overseas duty was working close to the bone, but Helms had confidence in the professionalism of Agency officers assigned to the task. He felt no need to issue strict warning to the case officers that these American agents were not to be used to get information about the domestic antiwar movement. "I thought everybody in the Agency over the age of 12 knew that this was one of the guiding principles of Agency operations, but I certainly on various occasions in talks with Ober and others had plenty of opportunity to reemphasize this. I don't think anybody had any doubt about it."[26]

Even so, in a handful of instances later investigators found this "guiding principle" had been slighted. Information about activities in the United States, obtained from infiltrated agents, was retained in SOG files. On three separate occasions, MHCHAOS agents were specifically used to gather domestic intelligence. SOG studies, notably "Restless Youth," dealt with purely domestic matters

Looking at MHCHAOS-related activities in 1975, the Rockefeller Commission found many of them profoundly disturbing. While it held that the "declared mission of gathering intelligence abroad as to foreign influence on domestic dissident activities was proper," it nevertheless found that some of the domestic activities carried out under MHCHAOS auspices "unlawfully exceeded the CIA's statutory authority." Commission members voiced particular concern that SOG "became a repository for large quantities of information on the domestic activities of American citizens, . . . much of [which] was not directly related to the question of the existence of foreign connections." Their conclusion:

> It was probably necessary for the CIA to accumulate an information base on domestic dissident activities in order to assess fairly whether the activities had foreign connections. . . . But the accumulation of domestic data in the Operation exceeded what was reasonably required to make such an assessment and was thus improper.[27]

Richard Helms fully appreciated how close to the line presidential demands were pushing him. He ordered the study "Restless Youth" produced in two versions, one containing a section on the domestic scene, the other without this section. Only the second version was distributed to other community agencies; the first was reserved exclusively for the White House and two or three key presidential advisers. In delivering the fuller

[26]Helms interview, 22 June 1983.
[27]Rockefeller Commission, pp. 24-25.

version to President Johnson, Helms appended a covering memorandum noting, "You will, of course, be aware of the peculiar sensitivity which attaches to the fact that CIA has prepared a report on student activities both here and abroad." Giving Kissinger the study early in 1969, Helms went even further. His covering memo explained that the report contained a section on American students and stated:

> This is an area not within the charter of this Agency, so I need not emphasize how extremely sensitive this makes the paper. Should anyone learn of its existence it would prove most embarrassing for all concerned.[28]

In truth, Helms found himself in a rather tight bind. The more he reported the absence of significant links between domestic dissent and foreign enemies, the greater the skepticism he encountered from both the Johnson and Nixon White Houses. Yet the only way to prove the Agency's contention—to prove a negative, so to speak—was by expanding the program, by investigating all dissidents. Helms and his associates would later argue—with a certain logic—that, unless they looked into the origins and nature of domestic dissent, they would be unable to gauge the significance of the foreign contacts they did uncover.

Even so, the DCI tried to maintain the distinction between domestic and foreign activities. In March 1968, Helms rejected a joint Office of Security/Directorate of Plans proposal that entailed recruiting agents to penetrate domestic dissident groups to obtain information on foreign contacts. This, he ruled, was beyond the Agency's jurisdiction and would cause widespread criticism if it became public knowledge. Eighteen months later, in a memorandum to the four Deputy Directors heading Directorates, he restated SOG's intentions to observe "the statutory and de facto proscription on Agency domestic involvements."[29] Helms's Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI), R. J. Smith, has also recalled one of the Director's morning meetings where Helms announced, quite deliberately and with great firmness, "We do not operate against Americans in this country. Keep your hands off Americans in this country."[30]

Yet, as information on MHCHAOS and related programs came to light in the mid-1970s, Helms professed not to understand the furor—"straining at gnats," he termed it. On more than one occasion he expressed the conviction that, once tempers cooled, dispassionate examination of exactly what happened would disclose that the whole affair was not "all that much of a much, particularly the issue about the files [on] Americans [held] in the Agency. There was never the slightest intention on anybody's part to set up duplicate files with the FBI or to persecute Americans or to

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 134.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 136.
[30] See Helms interview, 22 June 1983, for Smith's recollection.

do anything with Americans." During the course of MHCHAOS, he explains, SOG maintained a heavy paper flow with the FBI. "Obviously, we had to keep track of these papers, we had to file these papers, and over time we built up a tremendous file. But it was not with any malign intent. I don't know of anybody who was really damaged in the process." Helms, indeed, goes much further than this. The whole MHCHAOS business has been badly overblown, he protests:

> All this nonsense about the Agency's role in distorting American democracy, I think it's just the biggest pile of crap imaginable, and I think history will show this to be the case. In other words, when people come up with all this junk about the senior officials in the Agency, and Agency operatives and Agency analysts having malign purposes and intent, it just doesn't show up on the record, and I think that history ought to show that this was the case. There may be a lot of dirty tricks in future times, but there haven't been dirty tricks on Americans in the past, and they're damned lucky they had the kind of people they did running their organization so that they didn't.[31]

In Helms's defense it is worth noting (as the Church committee did) that the concept of "internal security" in the years since 1945 had almost always had a foreign dimension.[32] The McCarthyism of the 1950s, for instance, reflected a concern with externally directed subversion of the American Government, for the benefit of the country's foreign enemies. The concern in the late 1960s and early 1970s about a completely domestic internal security threat, from groups wholly independent of foreign influence, was a new wrinkle. Moreover, Helms apparently distinguished in his own mind between domestic penetration of dissident groups by CIA agents and contact with these groups incidental to the overall objective of gaining access overseas to information on foreign contacts—that is, a distinction between deliberately acquiring intelligence concerning domestic activities and incidental acquisition of information while in pursuit of other objectives. The distinction, it turned out, was a fine one, easily crossed.

In fact, Helms received several warnings that even within his own Agency this murky distinction caused deep concern. On more than one occasion he reassured worried subordinates of the propriety of SOG operations. In 1970, in response to concern expressed by midlevel officers comprising a CIA management advisory group, the DCI assured them that the program had been properly authorized. In early December 1972, MHCHAOS received a critical review by the Executive Director–Comptroller, which brought forth another defense of the program from the

[31]Helms interview, 22 June 1983.
[32]US Congress, Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church committee), *Final Report, Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans*, 94th Cong., 2d sess., Book III, April 1976 (hereafter cited as Church committee, Book III), pp. 686-687.

Director's office. "As time went on," he has related, "I recognized that inside the Agency, particularly among the young, there were some who felt that this was an inappropriate activity for the Agency." But the DCI was not to be turned back. "Nevertheless, it did not seem to me proper that I should give up this activity simply because some young men didn't like it. I mean, there are often generation gaps, and there are often differences in perception." As for the criticism that he "was not morally tuned to the younger generation or something, I heard all the arguments and I still thought that it was desirable that we continue on with this endeavor."[33]

One is left with the conclusion that, while Helms almost certainly realized that MHCHAOS was leading CIA to the very edge of, or—as his warning to Kissinger demonstrates—beyond the limits of its mandated authorities, he found it difficult or impolitic to buck the insistent White House interest in the subject. This may explain why he never consulted the Agency's General Counsel about the propriety of CIA engaging in this sort of program. Assuming the operations could be kept secret (a sine qua non for Helms), discreet disregard for the letter of the law must have seemed a feasible policy. While acknowledging the tremendous pressure that the White House exerted on Helms, many later observers thought this an unfortunate, even a dangerous position.

Yet the problem of how to cope with forceful Presidential directives of questionable legality remains. It is easy for one not subject to the commands of the President of the United States to judge that Richard Helms should have evaded, deflected, or flat refused those commands. Easy, yes; but also insensitive to the sense of crisis pervading those times, to the ingrained habits of obedience and duty characteristic of most professional intelligence officers, and to the unchallenged authority of the President in those pre-Watergate days. To date no one has been able to reconcile these elements satisfactorily. Members of the Rockefeller Commission, for example, could do no better than to offer the self-evident observation that "the proper functioning of the Agency must depend in large part on the character of the Director of Central Intelligence."[34] While no one would quarrel with this formulation, it fails to provide any readily useful guidelines for a Director faced with an insistent President. What constitutes "improper pressure"? Where lies the line between necessary flexibility and unbending principle? By what authority should the DCI, who is neither a policymaker nor a judicial officer, presume to challenge the judgment of the President, the White House staff, or the Attorney General? At what point does accommodation slide off into surrender? These are not simple questions, as Richard Helms discovered to his considerable grief. But the difficulty in resolving them had best not deter us from addressing them head-on, if for no other reason than to save some future Director from Richard Helms's quandary.

[33]Helms interview, 22 June 1983.
[34]Rockefeller Commission, p. 17.

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Chapter 2

Intelligence Production

Russell Jack Smith

When Richard Helms became CIA Director on 30 June 1966, he took command of a mature, smoothly functioning organization for producing finished intelligence. Most of this intelligence was disseminated to the President and his foreign policy advisers in one of two ways: through formal National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs), or in various publications of the Directorate of Intelligence (DI), ranging from daily periodicals such as the *President's Daily Brief* to long-range, in-depth studies of political, economic, and strategic developments worldwide.

Then as now, these two forms of production were not mutually exclusive in either subject or scope. For example, in dealing with the number-one preoccupation of the period, the Vietnam war, Helms employed both methods to provide intelligence support for the planning and implementation of policy. NIEs, usually thought to be broad in scope, on occasion addressed short-range, contingent matters while the DI undertook the analysis of long-range trends. Despite the overlapping nature of these modes of production, it is perhaps helpful to discuss separately the use Helms made of each. This chapter will look first at the NIEs and then turn to the publications of the DI.

By June 1966, the Office of National Estimates (ONE) was in its 16th year and had become entrenched by personnel and procedures that extended back to the Eisenhower administration. The Office, under the leadership of Sherman Kent, consisted of a board of senior officers—the majority of whom had been officers in ONE since 1950—and a staff of about [redacted] generalists.

ONE followed a routinized procedure for producing NIEs. The staff prepared a draft, based in part on contributions from intelligence analysts in the Departments of State and Defense. The board then reviewed, amended, edited, and approved it and sent it out to be coordinated word for word by other members of the intelligence community. The draft was forwarded to the Director for approval and finally presented to the United

States Intelligence Board (USIB)—a panel of representatives from the various intelligence agencies—for coordination, final approval, and distribution. The process normally took weeks or months, but on special request or during emergencies it could be reduced to days, even hours.

By the mid-1960s, subjects of the Estimates had become fixed by custom laid down during the Eisenhower administration, when NIEs were prepared as annexes to policy papers for consideration by the National Security Council. Some Estimates, particularly those dealing with the USSR, were done annually; others, every two or three years. By 1966, ONE was producing approximately [redacted] Estimates each year, of which about 75 percent were programmed well in advance and 25 percent were undertaken to deal with emergent conditions or spontaneous requests.

Helms, whose career to this point had been devoted almost exclusively to the Clandestine Services, had previously had only passing acquaintance with national Estimates. Officials in ONE worried that his attitude toward Estimates might resemble that of Allen Dulles, who had also come to the directorship from a background devoted principally to clandestine activities, and who gave Estimates a secondary place in his array of priorities. But from the outset Helms exhibited an active interest in the quality and timeliness of national Estimates. On his second occasion as chairman of the USIB, he complimented the Board of National Estimates on the timeliness of NIE 14.3-66, *North Vietnamese Military Potential for Fighting in South Vietnam*, noting that this subject was of maximum interest to policymakers at the moment.[1] At a subsequent meeting he remarked on how well the ONE's Panama Estimate had held up during a policy discussion at the White House.

It is worth underlining that Helms primarily valued Estimates for their timeliness. ONE's programmed production and long leadtimes did not always make Estimates emerge at the moment they were urgently needed. Helms constantly struggled to minimize this problem. On one occasion, having informed USIB that a paper then under way on Jordan was needed so urgently that time would not permit normal coordination procedures, he asked that divergent views be forwarded directly to ONE.[2] On another occasion he prodded Kent on a delay in finishing NIE 11-8-67, *Soviet Advanced Weapons Systems*, since Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had requested early delivery of the paper.[3] Helms later broadened his concern to include all estimates pertaining to Soviet military capabilities, stressing that the subject was of great and growing importance to the United States Government and that the Estimates comprised one of the principal tasks facing USIB in 1968. He then urged the Board to make every effort to meet the new schedule requested by McNamara, which had

[1]USIB Minutes, 7 July 1966.
[2]USIB Minutes, 17 November 1966.
[3]Morning Meeting Minutes, 13 October 1967.

moved completion dates forward by a month.[4] But such exhortations proved only marginally effective. The relative sluggishness and inflexibility of the national Estimates production process caused Helms in his years as DCI to turn increasingly often to other modes of production and communication.

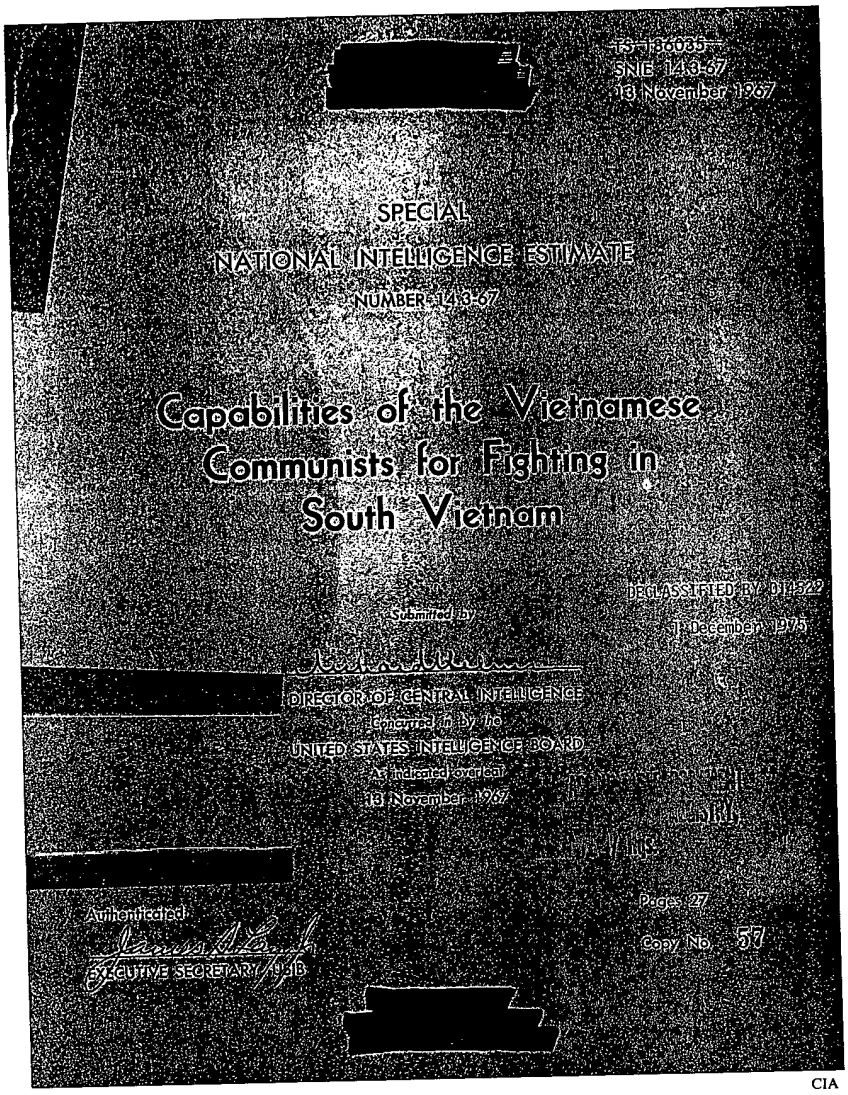
In 1966 the Agency produced estimates by a process that had been in use since the Korean war. Broad agreement among executive branch agencies made it easy to obtain separate departmental approvals (a process called "coordination") for an estimate that served as a basis for later coordinated policy documents. During his tenure as DCI, Helms witnessed the disintegration of the foreign policy consensus on which the old estimative process relied. Interdepartmental disputes began in 1967 over the strength of enemy troops in Vietnam and later spread to issues relating to Cambodia and the effectiveness of US bombing. By the onset of the Nixon administration, the CIA found its reports challenged by the departments of Defense and State and the White House. Struggling to maintain the Agency's credibility amid growing criticism, Helms employed all his bureaucratic skills—compromising occasionally, retreating when necessary—to maintain a steady stream of intelligence to the President.

The Vietnam Estimate

The Vietnam war destroyed the postwar consensus behind the containment policy, and it was in attempting to coordinate an estimate on Vietnam that Helms first encountered stiff opposition to an Agency estimate. The controversy began in 1967 over SNIE 14.3-67, *Capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists for Fighting in South Vietnam.* Nearly two decades after the preparation of this estimate, the details of the procedure were still being debated in a highly publicized lawsuit brought by Gen. William C. Westmoreland against the Columbia Broadcasting System.[5]

In the preparation of this estimate trouble arose over enemy strength figures between Washington-based analysts (particularly those in CIA) and Saigon-based analysts at the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). The sources of difficulty were many and complex, ranging from differing interpretations of equivocal evidence, to varying definitions of enemy organizational structure and order-of-battle categories, to differing concepts of the essential nature of the war itself. In combination these factors made analysts in both Washington and Saigon stubbornly unwilling to accept the order-of-battle numbers of the other party.

[4]USIB Minutes, 4 January 1968.
[5]In this case, Westmoreland alleged that CBS and others libeled him in a 23 January 1982 telecast entitled "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception."


[redacted]
TS-136035
SNIE 14.3-67
18 November 1967

SPECIAL
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE
NUMBER 14.3-67

Capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists for Fighting in South Vietnam

DECLASSIFIED BY 011322
1 December 1975

Submitted by
[redacted]
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD
as indicated overleaf
18 November 1967

[redacted]

Authenticated:
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, USIB

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CIA

SNIE 14.3-67, Capabilities of the Vietnamese Communists for Fighting in South Vietnam

This problem was not new, nor is it surprising in retrospect that Vietnam aroused bureaucratic feuds. The war furnished the first occasion in American military history where a civilian, Washington-based intelligence organization had taken direct issue with an American army fighting in the field over the size and composition of the enemy forces that that army faced. By tradition, assessing the enemy's order of battle had always been a

strictly military responsibility. Two developments served to change this practice: first, the peculiar nature of the limited war in Vietnam, where Washington maintained tight political control; and second, CIA's growing expertise in order-of-battle analysis. Moreover, the political nature of the war in Vietnam, where the enemy's main force units were supplemented by irregular forces at varying levels of strength and commitment, required decisions about force allocations that were difficult to accommodate to conventional order-of-battle tables, and which military officers were often reluctant to accept. Another element in this mix was Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's penchant for numerical indicators of progress, an approach that placed pressure on the Command in Saigon to produce numbers that reflected victories commensurate with the effort expended.

DI analysts, whose work ONE relied upon in producing national estimates, had wrestled with military analysts both in Washington and overseas for months before the preparation of SNIE 14.3-67. Helms had been made aware of the controversy early in his incumbency. Barely two weeks after becoming DCI he ordered CIA components to review and improve their procedures for maintaining statistics on Vietnam.[6] Six months later he urged the CIA leadership to exercise care in producing figures on Vietnam and stressed the importance of having the Agency speak with one voice.[7] But the controversy continued to defy resolution, and in June 1967, Helms directed the DI to sort out and rationalize CIA-DIA differences on the number of defections and recruits in Vietnam, one of the several sources of disagreement.[8]

By July 1967, however, the disagreement between the contenders was full-blown and seemingly irreconcilable. It centered, Kent informed Helms, around the number of non-main-force units in Vietnam (that is, guerrillas, people's militia, part-time combatants). The military's estimate was roughly half as large as the CIA figure.[9] CIA based its estimates of non-main force strength largely on the analytic work of Samuel Adams, who sifted figures from a large volume of low-grade source material such as interrogations of prisoners of war.[10]

In early July 1967, Helms ordered SNIE 14.3-67, scheduled that week for USIB consideration, withdrawn and remanded for further work.[11] The controversy raged back and forth between Saigon and Washington without

[6]Morning Meeting Minutes, 13 July 1966.
[7]Morning Meeting Minutes, 12 January 1967.
[8]Morning Meeting Minutes, 13 June 1967.
[9]Morning Meeting Minutes, 5 August 1967.
[10]Many thought that Adams's zeal, admirable in pursuit of accurate numbers for these "people's militia," later became obsessive when he sought to use his research to refute the entire order of battle that the military had produced for North Vietnamese units. Still later, after the entire CIA chain of command had provided Adams with a number of opportunities for presenting his case, he took his cause to the public media and charged Helms and others with deliberate malfeasance. Adams was the principal consultant for the CBS program, "The Uncounted Enemy," which was largely based on his allegations and a key witness for CBS in their defense against Westmoreland's libel suit.
[11]Morning Meeting Minutes, 6 July 1967.

resolution for the rest of July and nearly all of August. A draft SNIE 14.3-67 emerged again for USIB consideration with the wide-open split prominently displayed. He felt that a split of this dimension over the size of the enemy forces, especially one on which the complexities of the problem and the uncertainties of the evidence made it impossible for either side to prove the other wrong, was simply not useful. Helms withdrew the draft from the USIB agenda once again and ordered work on the estimate suspended while a Washington team of analysts went to Saigon to make one more attempt to establish agreement with MACV. To lead the team of DI and DIA analysts to Saigon, he selected George Carver, his Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs.

The ensuing discussions in Saigon became, in Carver's words, "pretty warm and pretty bloody." Much of the disagreement derived from differing concepts about the military organization of Vietnamese forces. As Carver later explained, a basic conceptual problem ran throughout the whole exercise. "The North Vietnamese simply do not wire together their structure" the way we do "and they used completely different organizational concepts." Some of the difficulty involved nomenclature. "For example, a guerrilla to us meant any little guy in black pajamas; a guerrilla to them meant somebody in a military unit that was subordinate to a district or a village committee, as opposed to somebody who was subordinate to a provincial or regional committee that we classed as being main force." The inconclusive—"spongy" is Carver's word—nature of much of the evidence, particularly that based on prisoner interrogations, only compounded these differences in view.[12]

Beset with these difficulties, progress toward agreement on a set of Vietnamese order-of-battle figures was slow. There wasn't much disagreement on the numbers for main force units, but agreement on the number of irregulars responsive to Vietnamese military discipline remained elusive; the Washington-based team's figure was approximately double that of the Saigon analysts. At this point, Carver cabled Helms that a series of "long and bloody sessions" had produced no resolution and that the outlook for agreement was bleak. He suggested a private session with Westmoreland, commander of MACV, where he might be able to work out a compromise formulation, substituting words and approximations for precise figures where agreement could not otherwise be obtained. Helms instructed Carver to proceed according to his own best judgment.

When he met privately with Westmoreland, Carver proposed that the estimate should present the enemy order of battle in three parts. First, those elements of the organized opposition for which the evidence was sufficiently hard to make quantification meaningful would be given a single figure.

[12]George Carver, interview by R. J. Smith, Washington, DC, 13 May 1982 (hereafter cited as Carver interview, 13 May 1982).

Second, those components for which some hard evidence existed, but not enough to come up with a single figure, would be ranged—it being understood that "between 20 and 40 thousand" did not mean "30 thousand," but rather that the uncertainty ran from 20,001 to 39,999. Finally, those components for which a lack of hard evidence made any figure meaningless would be described by words rather than numbers. Westmoreland bought this proposal, and it became the basis for the Vietnamese order of battle in SNIE 14. 3-67. Agreement had finally been obtained.

Carver's compromise, however, resulted in an odd document. CIA figures, showing a total enemy structure approaching half a million men, were spelled out in the text of the estimate. But the tables accompanying the text listed only the agreed figures on the enemy's main force units. In addition, the estimate's summary mentioned a total enemy strength of only 188,000 to 208,000, less than half the figure described in the discussion part of the estimate. Because most policymakers were not likely to read beyond the NIE's summary, Carver's compromise effectively buried CIA figures.

Critics of Helms's leadership of CIA have seized upon this episode as evidence of his unwillingness to stand fast on Agency judgments and of a readiness to trim in response to outside political pressure. It is a serious charge deserving of close examination.

The dispute between CIA and the Saigon Command over Vietnamese strength figures had been so protracted that a large part—it sometimes seemed like all—of official Washington was aware of it. Congressional leaders told the CIA Legislative Counsel of their concern over the "numbers problems."[13] Johnson, impatient with the disagreement, asked Carver, "Can't you people get together? You're all dealing with the same pool of evidence, aren't you?" The dispute was not an idle bureaucratic rumpus. The opposed estimates supported dramatically different policy prescriptions: Westmoreland's figures indicated progress had been made and more still could be achieved; CIA figures indicated that the Viet Cong's access to a large and growing manpower pool had been virtually unaffected by escalating US attacks. Disagreement between the Agency and DOD over the estimate could split the administration and provoke a policy crisis. Helms felt the strongest obligation to arrive at an agreed figure the White House and the Secretary of Defense could use for fighting the war.

Notwithstanding Johnson's impatience, Helms received no specific pressure from any source to conform to the views of Westmoreland and the Saigon Command. Johnson, McNamara, Presidential assistant Walt Rostow, and many others were aware of the controversy, Helms explains, but "this was not something that was normally discussed at policy meetings. . . . Johnson, and McNamara particularly, had confidence in what we

[13]Morning Meeting Minutes, 24 August 1967.

were trying to do. They saw that everybody was struggling with this as best they could."[14] For both parties the central objective was to reach agreement and not to force the other party to knuckle under. But they were dealing with an issue too complex for most nonexperts to understand where divergent views, based on fragmentary evidence, had equally valid claims to respectability.

Nonetheless, Helms and his subordinates recognized the value of unanimity regarding the size of the military forces confronting the United States and felt the pressures to reach a consensus. As SNIE 14.3-67 was being readied for final USIB consideration, Kent reported at the Director's morning meeting that dissenting footnotes on the paper were ready for approval. Helms replied that every effort should be made to avoid dissent in this paper.[15]

The need for consensus brought Carver, with Helms's endorsement, to propose the compromise that Westmoreland accepted. Nearly 20 years later, the decision remains controversial. Clearly, however, it would have been simplistic and intellectually dishonest to insist that the higher CIA figure for irregular forces was carved in granite, based as it was on spongy evidence and a complex methodology. Carver denies that Helms trimmed his judgment or instructed his representative to yield. "I never knew him to trim on a judgment, and certainly never on anything I was dealing with did he ever direct me to trim."[16]

Events later demonstrated the superiority of the figures developed by Langley analysts. In all likelihood, however, historians will never agree on a single judgment concerning the way in which the CIA-MACV dispute was resolved. An Agency-sponsored study, published in 1984, has perhaps come as close as any to summarizing this complex issue. Johnson, it notes, brought great pressure to bear on all the principal players to document progress in the war effort. What Bruce Palmer has called "a certain amount of self-deception on the part of the White House, as well as MACV, and the US Embassy in Saigon, to emphasize good news and discount bad" may have rendered Helms's job in this instance nearly impossible. This study then concludes that no evidence exists to support the allegation that the strength estimates were deliberately manipulated for political purposes. "Nevertheless, a suspicion of slanting the evidence persists today, and it is doubtful whether this perception will ever completely disappear."[17]

Partly because of the prolonged controversy, but also because of the explosive message of a North Vietnamese "organized opposition" in the half-million range, Helms regarded SNIE 14.3-67 as a highly sensitive

[14]Richard Helms, interview by R. J. Smith, 3 June 1982 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 3 June 1982).
[15]Morning Meeting Minutes, 7 November 1967.
[16]Carver interview, 20 May 1982.
[17]Gen. Bruce Palmer, Jr., "US Intelligence and Vietnam," *Studies in Intelligence*: 28 (Special Issue, 1984) 5:52.

document. On its completion in November 1967, he limited distribution of the Estimate to the President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and each member of USIB.

The publication of SNIE 14.3-67 marked the end of a battle but not the end of the war between CIA and the American military over North Vietnamese strength figures. The need for full agreement between Saigon and Washington persisted, and Helms took a forceful role in the effort to achieve such an agreement. Active negotiations to find a consensus among Washington-based analysts in CIA and DIA resumed in March 1968, with the intent of bringing MACV into the discussions at a later date. Throughout these proceedings CIA maintained its position that in the quasi-political war in Vietnam it was essential to recognize the need for enemy strength estimates (the "organized opposition," Carver dubbed it) as opposed to classic order-of-battle numbers. MACV continued to oppose the higher numbers of irregular units which CIA, with partial DIA concurrence, supported. Only after a change of administration and numerous sharp exchanges was consensus achieved. In July 1970, Helms instructed his Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI), R. J. Smith, to send a memorandum containing the agreed numbers to Special Assistant Henry Kissinger, with a copy flagged for President Nixon.[18]

The debate that began over the size of Vietnamese forces soon grew into differences over the effectiveness of the United States' war effort. When Helms became Director, an intelligence memorandum was being prepared on the state of morale in North Vietnam in response to a request from McNamara. Entitled "The Will To Persist," it was a lengthy analysis of the elements contributing to the enemy's high morale. Although two DI offices, the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) and the Office of Economic Research (OER), handled the bulk of the analysis and writing, there was Agency-wide involvement, with the office of the Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs acting as coordinator. The memorandum had originally been scheduled for completion in late August, but characteristically Helms urged a swifter response to the McNamara request.[19]

"The Will To Persist" came to the pessimistic conclusion that US efforts in Vietnam as currently planned were not likely to deter the North Vietnamese nor slacken their effort in the foreseeable future. Despite this unwelcome message, Johnson commended the memorandum as a "first-rate job" and requested Helms to brief three key Senators—Mansfield, Fulbright, and Russell—on its contents.[20] Helms later reported that he carried out these instructions but concluded that the study failed to alter any senatorial positions on the war: Fulbright vociferously maintained the

[18]Morning Meeting Minutes, 6 July 1970.
[19]Morning Meeting Minutes, 7 July 1966.
[20]Morning Meeting Minutes, 31 August 1966.

struggle was a civil war, Mansfield was noncommittal but thought the study "thorough and objective," and Russell said he shared the memorandum's conclusions.[21]

In this same period McNamara requested CIA to undertake an analysis of the effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER, the US bombing program over North Vietnam. Although first-class competence for such work existed in OER, this was a remarkable request for a Secretary of Defense to make of a civilian Agency, and DDI Smith felt obliged to ask McNamara whether he wished the study coordinated with the Pentagon. "No," said McNamara, "I already know what the Air Force believes. I want to know what your smart guys think."

Like its predecessor study on North Vietnamese morale, the ROLLING THUNDER memorandum arrived at a conclusion quite pessimistic from the Pentagon's point of view: CIA logistics analysis demonstrated that ROLLING THUNDER was not achieving its objective of significantly slowing the flow of men and materiel into South Vietnam. Even though he realized that such a finding would please neither Johnson nor McNamara, both of whom were enthusiastic about prospects for an American victory, Helms termed the paper a "first-class job" and forwarded it to the White House and the Pentagon. He took care, however, to protect the security of the study by delivering the copies personally and restricting further distribution. McNamara was sufficiently impressed with the quality of the analysis to request that the ROLLING THUNDER assessment be repeated hereafter on a quarterly basis. The successor studies continued, with Helms's backing, to declare unflinchingly that ROLLING THUNDER was failing in its objective, ultimately judging that the North Vietnamese had managed in the teeth of the bombing program to improve their ability to move materiel south by five times. McNamara continued to respect the CIA work; later Helms reported to his deputies that the Secretary had thanked him for the "magnificent support" CIA had been giving him.[22]

In September 1967, Helms's analysts produced yet another controversial paper on the war in Indochina—this time a highly sensitive, tightly held memorandum written by John W. Huizenga, the chairman of the Board of National Estimates, and titled "Implications of an Unfavorable Outcome in Vietnam." This study spelled out the view dominant among CIA analysts and estimators that a US–South Vietnamese defeat did not necessarily mean a collapse of the rest of non-Communist Southeast Asia. In taking this position, Huizenga was boldly challenging the so-called domino theory.[23]

[21]DCI Chronological File, 20 August 1966.
[22]Morning Meeting Minutes, 12 December 1967.
[23]DCI Chronological File, 12 September 1967.

Unfortunately, one paper never reached the President—because it was never written. Early in 1968 the North Vietnamese launched the Tet offensive, a daring all-out effort by the Communists to inflict terminal damage on the South Vietnamese regime. In the eyes of many observers, initial enemy successes, coupled with the offensive's scope and surprise, made administration assurances about American progress in Vietnam ludicrous; victory seemed further away than ever. To CIA analysts and operational officers, on the other hand, the Tet offensive looked instead like a desperate and costly thrust that failed in its objective and did enormous violence to Communist cadre and networks by exposing them to US and South Vietnamese counterattack.

Whatever the long-term meaning of the battle, the facts remain that the Tet offensive caught the CIA by surprise. DI analysts in Saigon in the months before the offensive worried that something big was building, but their warnings to Washington were not sharply enough focused to convince the Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs (SAVA) or the DDI. And no one envisioned the impressive countrywide coordination of the enemy assaults, or the intensity of the attacks, or the fact that the Communists would target urban areas for their primary effort. Once the extent of the offensive became apparent, Helms directed his subordinates to collect and record all facets of the Agency's performance during the offensive for forwarding to the White House. He also instructed the DI to provide a detailed account of what had been reported or forecast before the offensive, and he ordered the Directorate of Plans to intensify efforts to recruit knowledge-able Viet Cong and North Vietnamese sources.[24]

Differences between the CIA and executive branch agencies intensified during the Nixon administration. The sharpest disagreements arose over Cambodia. In July 1969 the White House called for improved intelligence collection on Vietnam and Cambodia.[25] Helms pushed for intensified efforts to shore up the "flimsiness" of the Agency's intelligence on these two countries and urged his DDI to be discriminating in forecasting the situation in Cambodia.[26] But White House dissatisfaction with the quality of Agency reporting and analysis persisted. This discontent came to a head over the issue of North Vietnamese use of the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville for moving war materiel into South Vietnam. Once more CIA and MACV went head to head. The same analysts in OER who had done the distinguished logistics analysis for the ROLLING THUNDER bombing program, which had so impressed McNamara, were working the Sihanoukville problem. Unfortunately, the intelligence reports they had to work with were of poor quality, full of hearsay from third- or fourth-hand

[24]Morning Meeting Minutes, 11 August 1968.
[25]Morning Meeting Minutes, 10 September 1969.
[26]Morning Meeting Minutes, 12 May 1970.

sources. Exploiting this shoddy material to the maximum, and guided to a degree by the judgment that the flow down the Ho Chi Minh Trail was in itself almost sizable enough to account for enemy materiel in South Vietnam, the DI analysts arrived at a figure for tonnage funneled through Sihanoukville that was approximately half MACV's estimate.

Helms was aware of this controversy, which had begun during the last year of the Johnson administration and had urged repeatedly that efforts be made to resolve it. Both Carver and DDI Smith had been instructed during visits to Saigon to make special efforts to find common ground with MACV on the issue. Both officers discovered that the intelligence materials MACV analysts used were exactly the same as those available in Washington. They also found that the military analysts were modest to the point of being tentative about the figure they had finally produced, a modesty not reflected by the Saigon Command itself. Resting its confidence on the high quality of the Agency's logistics analysis in the past, and recognizing the penchant of the military for arriving at "worst case" judgments, the CIA leadership determined that the OER figure was the best that could be established from such inferior materials.

By this time the disagreement between CIA and the military had become a full-blown affair, in some respects paralleling both the CIA-MACV dispute over North Vietnamese order of battle and the CIA-Pentagon fight over the SS-9 and a Soviet first-strike capability. The parallel extended even to the intervention of Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird. In May 1970 the DDI brought to the DCI's attention Congressional testimony by Laird and JCS Chairman Wheeler that ran flatly contrary to a recent CIA-DIA agreement on the data base for estimating the importance of Sihanoukville.

[redacted] These records revealed that tonnage flowing into Sihanoukville and thence into the battlefield in South Vietnam was much higher than the CIA analysts had estimated. Worse yet, they at least equaled the levels MACV analysts had predicted.

DDI Smith reported to Helms in late July 1970 [redacted] This "excellent CIA reporting," Smith noted, brought into question all previous tonnage figures, which had been based primarily on [redacted] derived shipping data.[28] OER immediately set to work revising its

[27]The term "Clandestine Services" referred to the Directorate of Plans.
[28]Morning Meeting Minutes, 29 July 1970.

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Melvin Laird, Secretary of Defense and Gen. Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Sihanoukville shipment figures, incorporating the new reports into the analysis. Helms then delivered the new study, containing a figure somewhat higher than even the original MACV estimate, to Kissinger, together with an explanation of the analytic methodology applied to the new data.[29]

It was an acutely embarrassing moment for DI analysts—and even more so for the DCI. The entire episode served only to reinforce the negative impression of the quality of CIA analysis held by members of the Nixon administration. To Nixon, Laird, and Kissinger it seemed CIA had taken a negative, antiwar line in its opposition to MACV's order-of-battle figures, in its pessimistic assessment of the ROLLING THUNDER bombing program, and now in its tardiness in recognizing the importance of Sihanoukville. The tendentiousness of these judgments seemed obvious to men prone to regard any officer or institution outside the White House coterie as partisan and antiadministration. But on Sihanoukville the Agency was wrong, so wrong indeed as to be forced to admit the mistake openly. In the atmosphere of the early 1970s this demonstration of the fallibility of CIA analysis became an indictment of CIA integrity.

Throughout this episode, Helms retained his confidence in the honesty, objectivity, and demonstrated competence of his analysts. No reprimands were issued for poor performance because Helms recognized that the original judgment had been the best that could honestly be made

[29]Morning Meeting Minutes, 9 September 1970.

with the materials then available. The integrity of OER's officers was amply demonstrated by their complete about-face when solid evidence came to hand. Helms himself absorbed the harsh judgments and cynical comments that this affair provoked. Rather than transmitting these to his subordinates, he assured them that he understood how honest mistakes could be made in the imperfect world of intelligence analysis. He speaks of the episode philosophically:

> Obviously I was not pleased about Sihanoukville. . . . But you've got to take the good with the bad. Anybody who goes into the intelligence business, I think, goes into it with a recognition that God did not give prescience to human beings. . . . Intelligence officers haven't been endowed with prescience. . . . And therefore you've got to assume that you're going to make a lot of bad calls, particularly if you have any courage and really reach out there. So you've got to be prepared for the calls and prepared to take them and get on and try to do it better next time.[30]

Nonetheless, the damage was lasting. As Carver comments, Helms "was vulnerable because in any future major controversy where he really held the line, he would have been vulnerable to: 'Yes, but that's what you said about Sihanoukville.'"[31] While this was certainly true, Helms himself never took this line with the DI analysts who had made the mistake and who continued to take independent and often unpopular positions on critical intelligence judgments.

Vietnam placed new demands on the Agency, and Helms frequently found himself at the center of Cabinet disputes over the war's purpose and strategy. Throughout, he tried to maintain the Agency's role as a credible and important contributor to the policy process, defending CIA estimates while conceding their fallibility. His difficulties multiplied during the Nixon years, as the President grew increasingly intolerant of dissent within the executive.

Difficulties With Nixon

Despite his preoccupation with Vietnam, Helms continued to involve himself with a steady stream of national estimates on other sensitive matters. In April 1967 he emphasized to USIB members that US base rights overseas were currently of great interest to the administration.[32] In October he applauded the timely completion of NIE 11-8-67, *Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack,* characterizing it "a very good paper and important document."[33] That same month he referred to NIE 31-67, *India's Domestic*

[30]Helms interview, 3 June 1982.
[31]Carver interview, 20 May 1982.
[32]USIB Minutes, 13 April 1967.
[33]USIB Minutes, 26 October 1967.

Prospects, as highly useful for the PL-480 (Food for Peace) discussions then in progress and ordered prompt distribution to the Secretary of Agriculture and other interested officials.[34] Other examples of the attention he gave to estimates can be found in comments he made regarding NIE 80/90-68, *Potential for Revolution in Latin America*, which he commended for its clear, lively language and the wide range of its consensus on a subject so broad;[35] and in his remarks on NIE 13-9-68, *Short- Term Outlook in Communist China*, which he praised as a good job on a difficult problem.[36]

Yet, the three officers who served successively as chairman of the Board of National Estimates under Helms—Kent, Abbot Smith, and Huizenga—all shared the perception that Helms's interest and involvement in national estimates were not wholehearted. Kent has noted that "Dick wasn't very interested in some of the things we were required to do" citing estimates on Africa and Latin America.[37] Smith agrees. "I was quite sure he was more interested in the DDP [clandestine] business."[38] Huizenga puts it this way: "He was not, of course, deeply engaged substantively. He was focusing almost entirely on certain subjects that he thought of as politically sensitive." He adds that Helms "conducted himself in a fair and responsible manner with people responsible for estimates."[39]

These comments reflect, at least in part, different views about the audience the national estimates were designed to reach and the role they were expected to play. Helms judged estimates by their responsiveness to current concerns of top-level officials. The Board of National Estimates centered the bulk of its work on preprogrammed estimates, scheduled against anticipated policy activities within the Departments of State and Defense. With their long preparation times, estimates often dealt with issues of secondary concern to policymakers. Even when dealing with an urgent issue, they sometimes failed to consider aspects of the problem that emerged as situations developed. Among the 60-odd estimates produced each year, there would be a number that were of only perfunctory interest to the top echelons of the government.

In part, the difference in attitude over the role of estimates between the several chairmen of the Board of National Estimates and the DCI amounted to no more than a differing judgment as to how the estimates could be useful and effective. The Board felt that its papers could play a satisfactory role in the support of US policy at several levels of the

[34]USIB Minutes, 12 October 1967.
[35]USIB Minutes, 28 March 1968.
[36]USIB Minutes, 23 May 1968.
[37]Sherman Kent, interview by R. J. Smith, 19 April 1982 (hereafter cited as Kent interview, 19 April 1982).
[38]Abbot Smith, interview by R. J. Smith, 29 April 1982 (hereafter cited as Smith interview, 29 April 1982).
[39]John Huizenga, interview by R.J. Smith, 10 May 1982 (hereafter cited as Huizenga interview, 10 May 1982).

process, beginning with the individual bureaus in the Department of State. Helms was content that support at this level should continue, but strongly believed that the most important job that national estimates could do was to illuminate problems in a timely fashion for people making key decisions. Here, he felt, was where maximum impact could be achieved, and greatest service performed. "It's easy for intelligence people to forget that they're really a service organization, that they're really there to assist in the policy making process through other people," he has remarked:

> [I tried] to give the President, the Vice President, the Cabinet the impression that the Agency was there to be useful, to be of service, to be helpful. I did my damnedest, as a result of demands placed on the Agency . . . to see to it they were carried out and that the Agency put its best foot forward and the papers produced in a timely fashion . . . this is what we were in business for and we were going to do this as best we could.[40]

From the beginning of his tenure Helms established a pattern of alerting senior officers at his daily morning meeting of the issues on the minds of the President and the members of the NSC. The minutes of these meetings are punctuated with requests by Helms for the DI, ONE, or the Directorate of Science and Technology (DS&T) to prepare studies to meet urgent needs. On one occasion he advised the chairman of the Board of National Estimates that the White House felt keen concern over Soviet intentions regarding disarmament and directed ONE to produce a paper on the subject.[41] On another he urged the CIA leadership to focus on the likely situation in Southeast Asia after the war was concluded, saying this was a timely subject that would receive "intense scrutiny" from present and succeeding administrations.[42] These bird-dogging efforts by Helms to discover the current and emergent concerns of the key people grew in number and peaked during the final 18 months of the Johnson administration, when Helms achieved unprecedented access to the White House inner circle and became a regular guest at the prestigious Tuesday luncheons. During the Nixon administration this trend declined steadily—despite Helms's best efforts—as Kissinger placed more constraints on intelligence support and the White House sought to subject CIA and intelligence production to increasing political pressure.

The respect for national estimates among policymakers in the White House and NSC declined rapidly during the Nixon administration. Under Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, NIEs occupied a secure place in the national security policy making process. They were valued for their role in establishing consensus within the intelligence community on strategic issues, for their objectivity, for their freedom from departmental and institutional

[40]Helms interview, 3 June 1982.
[41]Morning Meeting Minutes, 1 July 1968.
[42]Morning Meeting Minutes, 4 November 1968.

bias. They did not always succeed in carrying the day on a given strategic judgment. They were sometimes, perhaps frequently, ignored, but they were seldom, if ever, challenged as being partisan or tendentious. This changed when Nixon, Kissinger, and Laird assumed their posts.

In part this change can be attributed to the disintegration of the Cold War consensus on foreign policy. The two parties had attempted to remove politics from foreign affairs during much of the postwar period, making diplomacy and strategy "nonpartisan" issues. The prolonged and difficult war in Vietnam created deep divisions within the United States Government about the fundamental aims and purposes of foreign policy. The war, and the containment policy that justified it, became objects of divisive and acrimonious debate between Democrats and Republicans, Congress and the Executive, and between Cabinet departments. In this atmosphere, the task of producing widely accepted, objective judgments became more difficult. Huizenga recalls that after the mid-1960s the tendency to treat intelligence politically increased markedly—particularly with respect to issues like Southeast Asia and the growth of Soviet strategic forces, which were politically divisive. "If we go back to an earlier phase of intelligence," he explains, "it was an easy job in the sense that there was a broad consensus in the country about foreign policy and how to think about the principal issues, the Russians and all that. Once that broke down, the job of doing independently conceived analysis became a hell of a lot more difficult. The pressure on the DCI inevitably mounted."[43]

The politicization of intelligence analysis was a byproduct of this disintegrating consensus. Since the Agency's inception in 1947, both the national leadership and successive DCIs had gone to great lengths to keep intelligence information and judgments out of the press and public discussion. They recognized that without such protection from public and partisan scrutiny it would be impossible for CIA to maintain its role as objective observer and analyst of international developments. Nixon administration officials ended this tradition. They wanted the Agency either to bring them the kind of news they expected—especially about Soviet intentions—or to maintain respectful silence.

We have already seen, in reviewing Helms's relations with the Nixon White House, the difficulty that the National Intelligence Estimates encountered with Nixon and Kissinger. Laird's attitude toward the NIEs was rather more selective. By and large, he was less critical of CIA analysis and estimating. In his previous position as Congressman from Wisconsin, he had occupied for many years an important position on the House Appropriations Subcommittee that had responsibility within the House of Representatives for the budgets of CIA and the Department of Defense. In that capacity he had befriended the Agency and lent valuable support on

[43]Huizenga interview, 10 May 1982.

several occasions. But his style then as well as later tended to be combative and adversarial. He was highly partisan on policy matters, and his public attitude toward the Soviet military threat was, if anything, more virulent even than Nixon's. It was from Laird's hand that Helms sustained a blow that has done much to bruise the DCI's reputation for firmness and integrity in defending CIA judgment and estimates.

This episode occurred in September 1969 in connection with an estimative paper on the Soviet ICBM designated the SS-9. CIA analysis indicated that the new Soviet missile, then nearing deployment, had powerful capabilities, but they were uncertain exactly how powerful. An unanswered question was whether the multiple warheads of the SS-9 were fitted with individual guidance systems to direct them precisely to dispersed US missile silos. The Nixon administration was just then seeking public and Congressional support to develop and deploy an antiballistic missile defense system, the Safeguard ABM. To provide a rationale for the multibillion-dollar ABM system, Laird and the Pentagon seized the Soviet development of the SS-9, claiming that its triple warheads were individually targeted (Multiple Independently Targeted Re-entry Vehicle, or MIRV). This weapon, military analysts declared, would enable the USSR to destroy the bulk of the US Minuteman ICBM force in one strike and demonstrated the Soviets' intention to develop a first-strike capability. The US ABM system, they argued, was an essential antidote.

The CIA took the opposite view on the SS-9's capabilities. Agency analysts believed that data derived from SS-9 testing indicated that the new ICBM had multiple re-entry vehicles (MRVs), not individually guided MIRVs. Soviet rockets had less ability to hit dispersed targets simultaneously than the Pentagon claimed. Agency analysts also refuted the contentions that the USSR sought to develop a first-strike capability. The Board of National Estimates held to the position it had maintained for several years that this was not a likely Soviet objective. The argument centered on three points: the undertaking would impose prohibitive costs on the Soviet economy; militarily the task was so complicated and difficult as to be almost impossible to achieve; and, finally, Soviet leaders would recognize that the United States would match their efforts step-by-step and thwart their objective.

The final crunch between Helms and Laird came in September 1969, but the buildup to this moment had been several months in the making. In March 1969, DDI R. J. Smith alerted the DCI that Laird's testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee attributed capabilities to the SS-9 that CIA information indicated it did not have.[44] Helms reviewed with his senior lieutenants the public debate then taking place regarding the Soviet

[44]Morning Meeting Minutes, 21 March 1969.

strategic threat, especially the CIA position on the question, and ordered a study of past NIEs to determine how those positions had been arrived at and how the CIA view on the SS-9 had been established.[45]

Pressure from the White House and the Pentagon steadily mounted throughout the spring and summer. In June, Helms told his top command that Pentagon officials had accused CIA officers of undercutting Laird's pro-ABM position on the Georgetown cocktail circuit. Laird felt that these rumors, together with CIA's official analysis of the SS-9, were killing the Safeguard ABM program. His deputies regarded the CIA as hidebound in its views on Soviet strategic intentions. Helms directed his deputies to ensure that no CIA officer took a public position, either pro or con, on the ABM issue. He further instructed those officers engaged in the analysis and estimating of Soviet strategic intentions to examine with great care all new evidence. They were to tear up all old papers and start again. They were not to become permanently convinced of the validity of their own judgments.[46]

By June 1969 a new paper addressing the capabilities of the SS-9 was in the works. Intended to update the previously published NIE with new evidence gleaned from the SS-9 test program, it encountered opposition in the coordinating sessions with the USIB agencies. Laird's firm line on the Soviet buildup suggested that final coordination of the estimative memorandum would be difficult. Helms nonetheless presented the memorandum in normal fashion at a regular USIB meeting and it emerged a coordinated USIB paper, laced with dissenting footnotes.

The next day, Deputy DCI Robert Cushman, a Nixon appointee, was called to the White House "to explain" the CIA position on the SS-9.[47] Kissinger requested that the officers directly responsible for the CIA position meet with him to discuss the memorandum. Helms directed Chairman of the ONE Board Abbot Smith and DDI R. Jack Smith to go. Kissinger and the NSC staff made it clear that they were disposed to accept the Pentagon position that the SS-9 had MIRV capabilities, and that they found evidence supporting the CIA view unconvincing. Kissinger requested a reordering of the paper and the provision of additional evidence pro and con on the MRV-MIRV issue.[48] Abbot Smith rewrote the paper to these specifications without altering the CIA position on the MIRV question or its

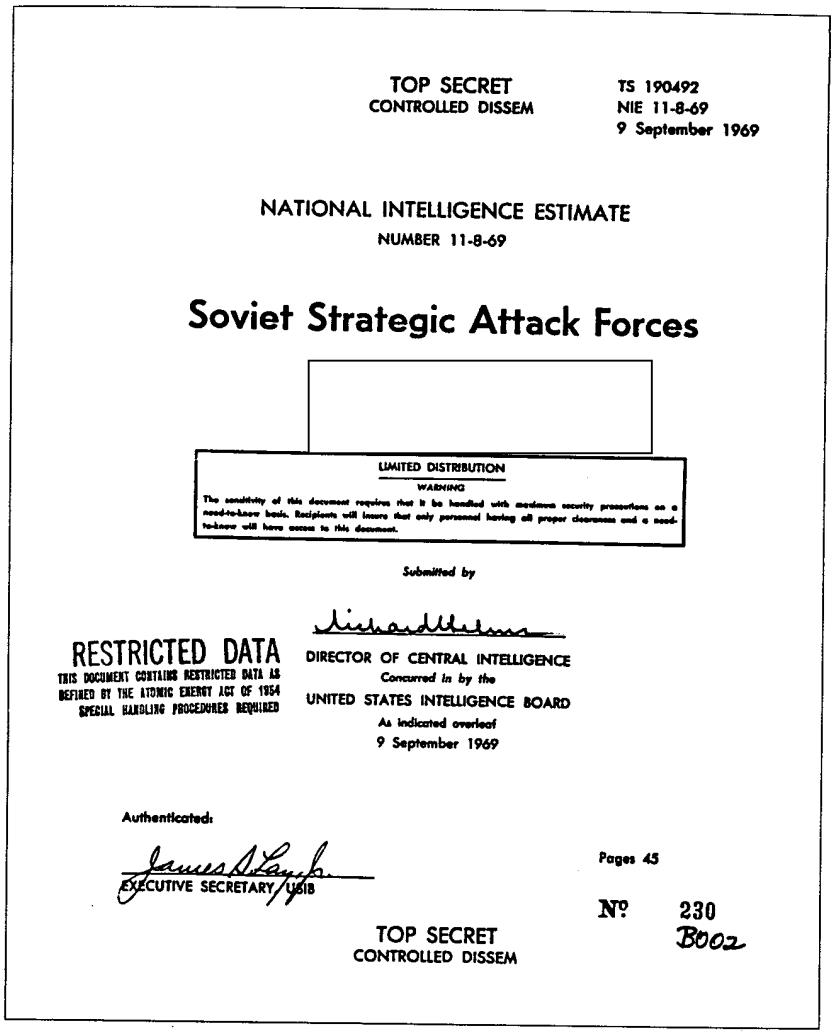
[45]Morning Meeting Minutes, 4 April 1969.
[46]Morning Meeting Minutes, 4 June 1969.
[47]Morning Meeting Minutes, 13 June 1969.
[48]Abbot Smith memorandum, cited in US Congress, Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church committee), *Final Report, Foreign and Military Intelligence*, 94th Cong., 2d sess., Book I, April 1976 (hereafter cited as Church committee, Book I), p. 78.

implications for Soviet strategic intentions. He received Helms's full backing, despite the heavy pressure that Nixon and Kissinger exerted on the issue and Laird's angry frustration.[49]

The controversy simmered throughout the summer of 1969. Pressure from the Nixon administration continued unabated and included a White House investigation of leaks to *The New York Times* that had revealed the CIA position on Soviet first-strike objectives.[50] Helms informed his officers that "responsible quarters" were charging CIA with a built-in bias in its estimates, but he made it clear that this was not his view and that he was not himself critical.[51] Cushman reported another White House appeal, this time from Kissinger's deputy, Col. Alexander Haig, who asked that distribution of the revised memorandum on the SS-9 be delayed until the White House could sort out its position.[52] Meanwhile, Laird, frustrated in his efforts to have the SS-9 declared MIRV-capable, had adopted the position that the triple warhead of the SS-9, even if unguided, would fall in a predictable pattern, called a "footprint." Such footprints, he told a national television audience, could be plotted in such fashion so as to produce as complete a destruction of US Minuteman fields as the MIRVs could have done. Rationalizations like these led Deputy Director for Science and Technology Carl Duckett to refer to Pentagon analysts as "The Inventors."

But though Helms maintained the CIA position on the SS-9 unflinchingly through the spring and summer of 1969, another test of strength approached in September, when the annual estimate on *Soviet Strategic Attack Forces*, NIE 11-8-69, was scheduled for coordination. Again the capability of the SS-9 missile and its implication for Soviet intentions to seek a first-strike offense were central issues. The Pentagon and CIA again took opposing views. The Pentagon, defeated on the MIRV claim, speculated on other Soviet inventions, including a complex retargeting-after-initial-firing scheme that CIA analysts considered beyond Soviet or even US technical capabilities. In early September, Smith informed the DCI that NIE 11-8-69 was in trouble with Laird and DIA. The next day Helms reported the receipt of Laird's comments on NIE 11-8.[53] This time Laird concentrated his fire on the Soviet first-strike issue as expressed in a specific paragraph that stated in condensed form the CIA view that the Soviets were unlikely at that time to seek a first-strike capability. To reinforce the Secretary's comments a Pentagon official passed the word indirectly to Helms that the views expressed in that paragraph ran contrary to

[49]It is at least historically interesting to note that throughout this stormy episode CIA maintained the view that the Soviets not only had not produced a MIRV in 1969 but also would be technologically incapable of producing one before 1974. The Soviets tested their first MIRV in 1974.
[50]Morning Meeting Minutes, 18 July 1969.
[51]Morning Meeting Minutes, 20 June 1969.
[52]Morning Meeting Minutes, 30 June 1969.
[53]Morning Meeting Minutes, 4 September 1969.



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NIE 11-8-69
9 September 1969

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE
NUMBER 11-8-69

Soviet Strategic Attack Forces

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positions taken publicly by the Secretary of Defense. At the USIB meeting of 4 September 1969, Helms announced his intention to withdraw the offending paragraph from the estimate. In subsequent discussion, the Director of the Department of State's intelligence unit dissented and reintroduced the paragraph as a footnote.

To many observers, inside and outside CIA, it has seemed that Helms buckled under pressure and forfeited his right as the premier US intelligence officer to speak out on intelligence issues without fear or favor. This

may indeed be the case, but it is a complex question and deserves careful and thoughtful scrutiny.

Certainly the episode was unprecedented. Never before had a Cabinet member pushed such a difference in judgment to the point of direct confrontation with a Director of Central Intelligence. But then the political-social climate then prevalent in the United States and the personal temperament and style of the Nixon administration were also without precedent. The paranoid, confrontational style of the Nixon administration often equated loyal dissent with political betrayal.

Laird, in fact, had invaded an area long reserved for intelligence estimators, the area of Soviet strategic intentions. No clear-cut distinction exists, or should, between the realm of intelligence judgment and policy rationale. Even so, one of the prime purposes of the NIEs on Soviet advanced weapons systems had by practice been to examine Soviet strategic doctrine in relation to weapon development and to discover the meaning, the purpose, and the intention behind those developments. It was a task CIA had performed for more than a decade. This was ground to which the CIA estimators had fully as much right as Laird. As Smith says, "There were always in the 11-8 papers a few paragraphs of general discussion of Soviet policies, prospects, and even intentions. And this was just the same kind of thing in that respect that had been written for years on end."[54] Huizenga supports this view: "It wasn't artificial language ginned up for this particular controversy. It was entirely in accord with the sort of thing that had been written about Soviet force planning, what motives guided them and so on, as in any other estimate."[55] To Laird, however, this was not merely an intelligence judgment with a right to exist independently of a policy decision, which he could, after all, make quite legitimately either on other grounds or in direct opposition to the intelligence judgment. To him, the first-strike claim was an essential part of the rationale supporting the decision to acquire an ABM system. He could accept no contrary view.

Some of these considerations may seem clearer in retrospect than they did to Helms, who was subjected to pointed and sustained criticism from the President, the NSC adviser, and the Secretary of Defense. Nonetheless, one is left with a troubling question as to why Helms, who had held staunchly to the Agency's view on these questions for six months, bowed to Laird's desire and had the offending paragraph removed.

It seems clear from Helms's recollections of this episode that, in his eyes, conflict between CIA and the Pentagon over Soviet first-strike intentions never became a matter of principle involving the jurisdiction of the DCI. For him, the decision to accommodate Laird by removing a specific paragraph from NIE 11-8-69 was only another instance of the coordination process integral to producing National Intelligence Estimates. As he told

[54]Smith interview, 29 April 1982.
[55]Huizenga interview, 10 May 1982.

the Church committee during its investigation, "A national intelligence estimate, at least when I was Director, was considered to be the Director's piece of paper. USIB contributed to the process but anybody could contribute to the process—the estimates staff, individuals in the White House. And the fact that a paragraph or a sentence was changed or amended after USIB consideration was not extraordinary. . . . I don't really see an issue there."[56]

As for the immediate issue of a Soviet first-strike capability, he recalls "a battle royale over whether it was the Agency's job to decide definitively whether the Soviet Union had its first-strike capability or did not have a first-strike capability. And this became so contentious that it seemed almost impossible to get it resolved."[57] But this in no way signifies that he yielded to pressure from the White House:

> My recollection is that the only time there was anything like this particularly at issue was over the business of MRVs and MIRVs. . . . After attending several meetings at the White House and talking with people in the Department of Defense it became clear to me that they at least had a legitimate point. . . . I don't think there was any reason for me necessarily to assume that all eternal wisdom was vested in the Agency and whatever they said had to be right and whatever anybody else said had to be "political pressure." It didn't make any sense to me at all. So I believe that on that occasion and maybe two or three others I insisted that certain adjustments be made in order to accommodate other points of view in Washington.[58]

Helms believed the Agency's primary task was to serve the President and his immediate lieutenants by keeping them informed steadily and regularly with intelligence information and analysis regarding global developments. To accomplish this, the Agency had to retain its credibility. Agency estimates could not get through to their audience if CIA judgments were deemed one sided and partisan. This danger was greatest in the area where political partisanship was most keen: the Vietnam war and the Soviet strategic threat. Helms was extremely sensitive to this possibility and sought in every way to avoid identifying CIA with a particular line on these issues. Nor was this a concern only of Nixon's. McNamara, Helms believes, "would not have accepted an estimate that said the Soviets were going for a first-strike. I don't think Johnson would have either. I think the Agency's credibility would have been ruined with those fellows."[59] Once Nixon entered the White House, the positions on Soviet intentions were reversed, but the difficulties facing Helms were in many respects similar. To remain credible, to retain access to the ears and minds of the top leadership of the administration he was serving, Helms decided to remove a paragraph that undercut one of the administration's main policy initiatives.

[56]Church committee, Book I, p. 79.
[57]*Ibid.*
[58]Helms interview, 21 April 1982.
[59]*Ibid.*

Helms's view of this particular incident accords completely with his firmly held conviction that throughout his career as DCI he resisted external pressures and upheld high standards of independence and integrity. He takes direct issue, for example, with a comment in the Rockefeller Report that the Director of Central Intelligence should be an individual of "stature, independence, and integrity."[60] Helms regards this as criticism of his performance as DCI and angrily rejects such an imputation. "I would like to know what . . . shows that I lacked in independence or lacked in integrity. Or because I didn't have a large constituency, either Republican or Democrat, I wasn't able to stand up to the problem."[61]

On another occasion, he again demonstrated the anguish and irritation that suggestions of this nature caused him. "I must say that the charge that the Agency was not objective, that it did not attempt to deal fairly with the facts and controversies and various estimative problems, I think has absolutely no basis in fact," he has remarked:

> I don't know of any time when there wasn't a sincere effort to accommodate all the varying pressures and still come out with what we thought was a proper answer. . . . These things will always be debatable; I chose not to turn off debate if I could possibly help it. I did feel that this was one of the most important functions the Agency had to play—whether it was under President Johnson or President Nixon.[62]

From Helms's point of view, his task was to achieve consensus on major intelligence judgments or, failing that, to hear all competing views and present to the President and the NSC the best judgment that could be formed in that light. "I would like history to show that we did our level best to make these estimates sensible, to try to accommodate the varying points of view, to come out where we thought we ought to come out—that we did an honest job with a great deal of integrity," the former DCI has observed. "It isn't that I feel any great feelings of resentment or that I was being used, or that political pressure was being put on me that I yielded. It is only the fact that it isn't true, and, therefore, I'd like the record to show that it's not true."[63]

Not everyone agreed. To the Board of National Estimates, and particularly to its chairman, Abbot Smith, the removal of the paragraph in NIE 11-8-69 at Laird's request was anything but a part of the normal coordination process. It was unprecedented and keenly damaging to Agency prestige. It was, as Smith says, "the one and only time that politicians caused us to change part of a finished estimate."[64]

[60]Rockefeller Commission, p. 17.
[61]Helms interview, 21 April 1982.
[62]Helms interview, 3 June 1982.
[63]Helms interview, 21 April 1982.
[64]Smith interview, 29 April 1982.

Abbot Smith is reluctant to blame Helms for this episode and admires his overall record on National Intelligence Estimates. But the episode with Laird rankled the chairman. In response to Laird's request that the offending paragraph be deleted, he recalls, "Helms called me in. I protested a little. I didn't protest as much as I might have or should. Perhaps I should have resigned." The paragraph was not all that important, he explains, since its purport was repeated elsewhere in the estimate. "[I]t was ordered that it be deleted, and, of course, it was Helms's paper and he did it. But I didn't blame him at all. Why should he oppose the Secretary of Defense?"[65]

Smith nonetheless saw the SS-9 incident as marking the onset of a plunge in CIA prestige:

> I look upon that as almost a turning point from which everything went down. . . . The Nixon administration was really the first one in which intelligence was just another form of politics. And that was bound to be disastrous, and I think it was disastrous.[66]

Huizenga, at that time Abbot Smith's deputy and later his successor as Board of National Estimates chairman, agrees that this "unfortunate episode" set a bad precedent. "It was symptomatic of a tendency that developed more strongly later to view the efforts of the Agency on this kind of subject matter as not reliable and lacking in intellectual integrity and so on," he has recalled. "In other words, it was a significant episode because it was the first episode of its kind that indicated the unwholesomeness of the later period."[67] Huizenga also believes the issues in the dispute were important and is dismayed by the consequences of the Agency's retreat:

> The question involved in the disputed language was essential. It may not have been essential to the analysis in that particular paper, but what the passions were fired up over was the question of what the Soviets intended by these programs. Now with narrow construction you could say this language was not essential to that particular paper, but it nevertheless was central to the conflictive premises in people's minds over how to think about the meaning of Soviet programs.[68]

But Huizenga is even more reluctant than Smith to find fault with Helms's handling of an incident that he feels reflected damagingly on CIA integrity. After all, what else could the DCI do? "I suppose by the time the affair reached that sort of crunch where the Secretary of Defense personally is demanding the removal of language, it's a little late in the game to try and handle the matter so as to avoid confrontational attitudes," he has observed. "But it's very hard for me to see how the conflict of attitudes toward intelligence

[65] *Ibid.*
[66] *Ibid.*
[67] Huizenga interview, 10 May 1982.
[68] *Ibid.*

could have been avoided overall."[69] So in the last analysis he accepts Helms's view that it was preferable to yield in order to retain Agency credibility for future issues. He credits Helms with acting in accord with honest conviction and a concept of doing what was best for the Agency:

> I am persuaded that Helms wanted to do the traditional sort of job. In other words, try to deliver an honestly conceived product. But he was under very heavy pressure, and if in a certain case he, as some would say, trimmed, perhaps in his mind what he was doing was delivering the essential without being unnecessarily provocative. That is how he construed the removal of the paragraph on the SS-9 on the ground that it wasn't necessary to the essential argument of the paper, to which the paper was really addressed. That's a pretty fine judgment to make. For people who were not involved to come along later and say "This fellow really gave away the store" lacks comprehension for the complexity of his situation.[70]

It is significant that neither of these two Board chairmen attaches any blame or finds direct fault with Helms himself. To Smith, in retrospect, the fault is to be found not with Helms but with Laird. Laird, viewing CIA intelligence as "just another form of politics," had acted as a politician, not a Secretary of Defense, in seeking the removal of judgments contrary to a policy he favored. Huizenga sees the situation similarly but also emphasizes the inherent difficulty strategic intelligence, "honestly conceived," faces not only in stressful times like the Nixon administration but also even in calmer eras. He suggests, perhaps more cynically than the record will support, that the whole endeavor is too idealistic to succeed in the rough-and-tumble political world:

> In retrospect, you see, I really do not believe that an intelligence organization in this government is able to deliver an honest analytical product without facing the risk of political contention. By and large, I think that the tendency to treat intelligence politically increased over this whole period. And it's mainly over issues like Southeast Asia and over the growth of Soviet strategic forces that were extremely divisive politically. I think it's probably naive in retrospect to have believed what most of us believed at one time . . . that you could deliver an honest analytical product and expect to have it taken at face value as an honest effort in which you have tried to avoid any sort of partisan pleading or position-taking implications for policy. That whole attitude was probably naive. By and large, I think that intelligence has had relatively little impact on the policies that we've made over the years. Relatively none. In certain particular circumstances, perhaps insights and facts that were provided had an effect on what we did. But only in a very narrow range of circumstances. By and large, the intelligence effort did not alter the premises with which political leadership came to office. They brought in their baggage and they more or less carried it along. Ideally, what had been supposed was that . . . serious intelligence analysis could . . . assist the policy side to reexamine premises, render policymaking more sophisticated, closer to the reality of the world. Those were the large ambitions which I think were never realized.[71]

[69] *Ibid.*
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Ibid.*

After reviewing the circumstances that produced the deletion of the contentious paragraph in NIE 11-8-69, a sense of dissatisfaction remains. It is not quite good enough to find Laird totally responsible. Smith believes the incident marked "a turning point" and the onset of an irreversible trend, although in the next breath he characterizes this as "an exaggeration." It may be more judicious to accept Huizenga's view that the partisan political atmosphere of the time made an already difficult task impossible, and to look upon Laird's intervention as the symptom rather than the cause of a progressive disease. Still, the best interests of the United States required that informed judgments on strategic questions not be stifled for political purposes. If one accepts that everyone, including Laird, acted out of an honest conviction that he was doing what was best for the national interest, the fact remains that the result was not favorable to that interest nor to the organizations directly involved. It is difficult not to wish that some other resolution could have been found.

It seems clear that the incident had a greater impact on the Office of National Estimates than Helms realized. Helms regarded yielding to Laird's pressure as neither damaging CIA prestige nor establishing a bad precedent. But his two chief lieutenants in ONE did, even though they understood the political situation and were sympathetic to the bind he was in. Abbot Smith wonders in retrospect whether he should have resigned instead of stoically accepting Helms's decision. Perhaps he should have let Helms know how keenly he felt; perhaps Helms should have done more to justify his actions to his staff. But under the pressure of the situation, each assumed the other understood how he perceived the matter and said nothing.

In the aftermath of the controversy about the SS-9, Presidential Assistant Kissinger requested that future NIEs on Soviet advanced systems present in full detail the data and evidence underlying the judgments made. As Helms noted at the time, this required "a sharp break" from past procedures and would produce estimates "more specific in detail, more technical in [their] discussion, and more involved in sorting and evaluating the evidence." Still, he reminded Smith, "We are all engaged . . . in a common task: namely, to produce an estimate most responsive to the needs of policy people as they have been explicitly expressed to me."[72] The estimates produced to answer Kissinger's request were lengthy, technical, and minutely detailed. In effect, Kissinger and NSC staff had wrested from the Board of National Estimates the role it had previously played in sifting judgments from the available evidence and transmitting them to the President and the NSC for use in making policy decisions. In any event, the White House was pleased with the new style estimate, and in March 1971, Helms received from President Nixon a letter of commendation regarding NIE 11-8-71.[73]

[72]Helms Memorandum for Chairman, BNE, 4 May 1970.
[73]Morning Meeting Minutes, 11 March 1971.

Still, in the turbulent Nixon years political infighting over US policy in response to the Soviet threat went on unabated. There were leaks to the press of classified intelligence by parties who wished to advance their cause in the fray. Helms, trying to steer a steady course and to retain the integrity of CIA intelligence, sent a letter in June 1971 to Kissinger, Secretary of State William Rogers, Laird, and Gen. Earl Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressing his concern over the cumulative impact of these leaks. He also ordered his press relations officers to halt background briefings on Soviet military affairs.[74] The next week *The New York Times* ran the so-called Pentagon Papers, which constituted a virtual hemorrhage of classified intelligence.

Political partisanship was reflected increasingly within the intelligence community, and it became more and more difficult to reach a consensus on vital strategic issues. Helms recognized that in some cases CIA could best fulfill its function by stating its position independently when agreement was impossible. In September 1971, for example, he defended before USIB the position taken independently of the majority by CIA in NIE 11-14-71, *Warsaw Pact Forces for Operations in Eurasia.*[75] The following year he supported the independent CIA position in NIE 11-72, *Soviet Foreign Policies and Outlook for US-Soviet Relations*, a highly significant and courageous stand on his part since CIA held, in opposition to the Pentagon, that the USSR had not as yet decided whether to try for a meaningful advantage over the US in strategic weapons. This, it will be recognized, is in large degree a restatement of the CIA controversial stand on the first-strike issue. Despite the painful history of this subject in 1969, Helms chose in 1972 to champion the CIA view and to present it without apology to the President, Kissinger, and Laird.

Taking Helms's six-year stewardship of National Intelligence Estimates as a whole, it seems clear that he addressed this aspect of his job seriously and tried to meet the needs of the President and the NSC with coordinated papers. From the outset, however, he encountered difficulties owing to the absence of an administration-wide consensus on foreign policy issues. The NIE system had been designed to meet the requirements of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, and it tended to be too routinized and inflexible for the Johnson and Nixon administrations, both of which preferred an ad hoc foreign policy. Still, Helms sought by steady pressure to make the NIEs responsive on urgent questions and to applaud their success when it was achieved. He found it easier to reach targets in the White House with custom-tailored CIA papers and briefings, and to these he resorted increasingly as the years advanced. It is to an accounting of these efforts that we will now turn.

[74]Morning Meeting Minutes, 7 June 1971.
[75]USIB Minutes, 9 September 1971.

Changes in Intelligence Publications

Within the Directorate of Intelligence research and analytical skills had matured by 1966 to a degree that gave CIA acknowledged preeminence in the world of intelligence production. In the early years of the Agency this had not been the case, and coordination with the intelligence units of the Departments of State and Defense had produced markedly better papers. By the mid-1960s, however, the contributions of these other intelligence agencies consisted of differences in perspective, often revealing a policy or departmental bias. This shift in the balance of analytic expertise and competence, combined with the quick and pointed response capability of CIA DI production, led Helms to turn increasingly to CIA papers rather than coordinated estimates to meet the needs of the President and the NSC.

The Directorate of Intelligence served as spokesman for the Agency and produced the bulk of this noncoordinated, or "unilateral" output, although Helms occasionally looked to the Board of National Estimates, the Directorate of Science and Technology, and the Clandestine Services for papers. As the production workhorse of CIA, the Directorate of Intelligence, under R. Jack Smith, produced an array of publications [redacted] Within the Directorate, the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) played perhaps the key role in churning out this mass of finished intelligence. Other producing offices included Economic Research (OER), Strategic Research (OSR), and Basic and Geographic Intelligence (OBGI).

[redacted]

[redacted]

The principal vehicle for the expression of Agency judgment on major developments was the CIA Intelligence Memorandum. These studies varied in length, from two or three pages to several hundred, and were reserved for addressing important issues when it was felt the Agency's information and analysis had special pertinence. As it became increasingly difficult to reach coordinated judgments on such matters in the National Intelligence Estimates, the tendency grew to turn to the CIA Intelligence Memorandum for conveying Agency views. This became especially true on the major Vietnam issues.

Strategic matters and the ever-present Soviet threat were also frequent subjects of Agency analysis for the President. Early in the Johnson administration Helms instructed his deputies that "difficult decisions" confronted the White House on the ABM and requested that in their work on such questions as the development of Soviet advanced weapons systems, they remain objective and detached.[76] Somewhat later he advised them that the White House was deeply interested in disarmament issues and urged that appropriate studies be published on the subject.[77] He also delivered a word of caution, similar to his advice regarding making policy on Vietnam, on the subject of US-Soviet disarmament negotiations then in prospect. He anticipated numerous requests for Agency analysis of the principal issues and called for thoroughly professional objectivity in response. He especially urged the avoidance of *ad hominem* comments.[78]

Despite the confidence Johnson placed in Helms's judgment, he did not always accept the information or analysis the DCI provided. The war in Indochina demonstrates this innumerable times. Such an instance also occurred just before the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. For some time DI analysts had been closely watching the tense political situation in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet summer maneuvers in Eastern Europe. The Office of Strategic Research (OSR) under Bruce Clarke

[76]Morning Meeting Minutes, 8 December 1966.
[77]Morning Meeting Minutes, 1 July 1968.
[78]Morning Meeting Minutes, 1 August 1968.

observed in late July that the Red Army seemed to be swinging in steadily widening circles. On one of those swings, Clarke's analysts observed, Soviet forces might suddenly take a straight line and march directly into Czechoslovakia. But no reliable intelligence indicated that the Kremlin had already made a decision to use military force to bring Czech dissent to heel.

On his way out the door for one of the President's Tuesday luncheons (which incidentally did not invariably fall on Tuesday), Helms asked OCI for a last-minute update on the Czech situation. The only new item that OCI chief Richard Lehman had was an unconfirmed report from United Press International that the Soviet Politburo, customarily away from Moscow on vacation in August, was meeting in the Soviet capital. This seemed to suggest that a major issue was under consideration. Helms happened to know the UPI reporter and thought him to be usually right. On the basis of little more than this, plus an intelligence professional's intuition, he concluded that the Soviets were about to invade Czechoslovakia and decided to warn the President.

Drinking sherry with his guests in the living room before lunch, Johnson pulled Secretary of State Dean Rusk aside and conversed with him in low tones. The DCI had no opportunity to pass his information about the Politburo meeting to the President until they were seated at the lunch table. When he did, Johnson said, "Oh, no, I don't think you're right about that. They're talking about us." Helms found this quite mysterious but concluded from that and other veiled references that the President was about to make some initiative toward the Soviets. After lunch the DCI sought out the assistant who had taken notes and asked him what was happening. The young officer swore him to secrecy and then told him that on the following day there was to be a joint Washington-Moscow announcement of a forthcoming conference on arms control. This had been secretly arranged and might ultimately involve a trip to Moscow by Johnson. But Helms was not to be deterred. He said, "You heard my comments about the Russians invading Czechoslovakia. I want to be sure they're in the minutes." "They're in there," he was assured.

Helms was at a restaurant that evening when his call buzzer went off. The Operations Center at Headquarters told him the invasion was on. An emergency NSC meeting would convene at the White House in a few hours. As Helms relates it, the National Security Council meeting "took two minutes to discuss the invasion and the ensuing hour to figure out how they were going to kill the joint announcement that was scheduled for the next day" and to keep word of the postponed announcement out of the papers. "In other words, how they were going to tidy up what was obviously a package that had just dropped on the floor and splattered all over

the place."[79] There is no record that any of the participants remembered to thank the Director for his attempt eight or 10 hours earlier to warn them of the Soviet invasion.[80]

Producing information was only half the job; equally important was delivering it in timely fashion to the key people. While DI publications played a crucial part in this task, they were not the only means of communicating the Agency's judgments. Helms found that in many instances Agency intelligence was most effective if he presented it in person. He possessed a mind that dealt quickly with complex substantive problems, spoke easily, and conveyed an assurance of sincerity and objectivity. On many occasions the DCI was able to use these characteristics to bring CIA information and judgments to highly placed officials who might otherwise not have been reached at all.

As Director, Helms relied heavily on informal meetings with Cabinet members to discuss substantive intelligence matters. During the Johnson presidency the DCI met regularly with Rusk, McNamara, and Defense Secretary Clark Clifford at the Tuesday luncheons. This gave Helms first-hand knowledge of the problems and developments of keenest urgency for them. He used this knowledge to convey to his deputies at his daily morning meetings the subjects on which they ought to concentrate for intelligence collection and production . The minutes of the morning meetings during his six-year tenure are dotted with promptings from the DCI to focus attention on this or that matter that was burdening the mind of one of the Secretaries. He was also meticulous in passing back to his deputies the comments or compliments he had received on some piece of Agency work.

Helms strove to ensure close relations with the Department of Defense under Johnson, but relations deteriorated during the Nixon administration. Although McNamara received a steady stream of daily bulletins, periodicals, and memoranda containing both short- and long-range studies, he still felt a need for regular sessions in which he could ask questions and probe judgments being made about Vietnam. Helms assigned Carver the job of meeting with McNamara for this purpose. A routine evolved where Carver traveled to the Pentagon once a week for one-on-one sessions with McNamara lasting anywhere between 20 minutes and an hour and a half. McNamara was sufficiently taken with the utility of this procedure

[79]Helms interview, 21 April 1982.

[80]The Pike Report (Office of Legislative Counsel, "Review Comments on Draft Report," undated, attached draft copy of House Select Committee on Intelligence, Final Report, OCA, Job 79B-01000A, Box 2 [Secret]) reports that Helms told the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board in October 1968 that the failure to detect the Soviet invasion ahead of time "distresses me. "

to recommend it to Clifford, his successor. Carver continued the weekly briefings for Clifford, who recommended them in turn to Laird, his successor.[81]

This arrangement provided the Secretary of Defense with a direct channel to CIA that could provide intelligence and accept requests for more information and analysis. It gave Helms another direct link, through an officer whom the Secretary of Defense knew was empowered to speak for the DCI and the Agency on Indochina-related matters, to the man who, after the President, was the most important decisionmaker in Washington on matters relating to the war. As Carver notes, "this facilitated Agency-DOD coordination like nobody's business, and it was terribly useful in a lot of things."[82] It was an unusual arrangement, but the times and problems were themselves unusual. More to the point, it served the interests of both the Agency and the Secretary of Defense.

Nixon's inauguration had important effects on the DI as on the national estimates.

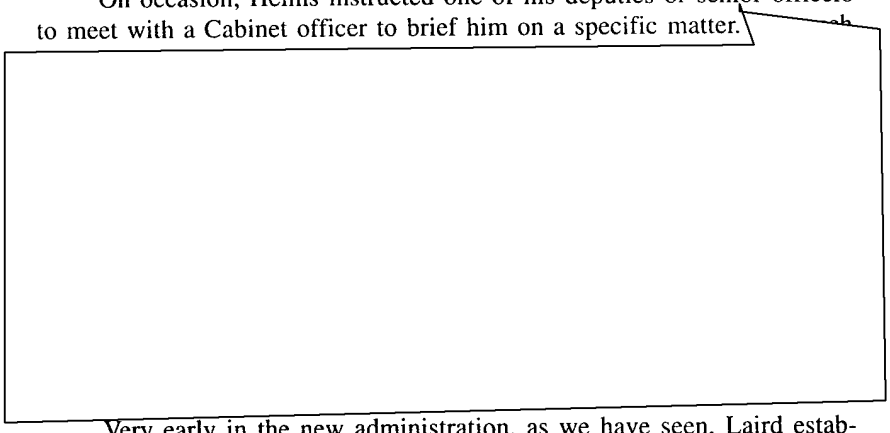
He and the President, he informed Smith, were concentrating their attention on the Soviet Union and Western Europe.

[81]This arrangement continued under two more Secretaries of Defense, Elliot Richardson and James Schlesinger, but ended when President Ford appointed Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary. Rumsfeld, Carver comments, was "paranoid, and . . . convinced that I was somehow sent by the Agency to spy on him. And he wanted no part of that, so that was that." Carver interview, 13 May 1982.

[82]Carver interview, 13 May 1982.

Kissinger and his NSC staff, on the other hand, displayed a voracious appetite for Agency intelligence, and Helms sent a succession of CIA memoranda, ultrasensitive Clandestine Services reports, and other materials to Kissinger, as well as to Laird and Secretary of State William Rogers. Much of the Agency's output was channeled to NSC subgroups, with specialized operational functions, which became active during the Nixon years under Kissinger's influence and, usually, under his chairmanship. Helms participated in most of the more senior of these groups, especially those involved with covert action. Others he assigned to his deputies; DDI Smith, for example, served as his representative in the Senior Review Group, a body charged with shaping policy papers before presentation to the NSC.

On occasion, Helms instructed one of his deputies or senior officers to meet with a Cabinet officer to brief him on a specific matter.



Very early in the new administration, as we have seen, Laird established the tone of the succeeding years, during his campaign on behalf of the Safeguard ABM system, by greatly exaggerating the capabilities of the Soviet ICBM, the SS-9. CIA's stubborn insistence that the available evidence would not support the Pentagon's claims did nothing to commend Agency performance to the Nixon administration. The subsequent public controversy over Soviet intentions to establish a first-strike capability, set off by a steady series of press leaks from both sides in the dispute, furthered this disaffection and quite clearly fed President Nixon's already active suspicions that the Agency and its Director were not at all points "loyal." The CIA position on the enemy order-of-battle figures, which as we have seen dragged into 1970, in all likelihood appeared to the White House as further evidence of CIA unreliability. It probably was too late to persuade the Nixon administration that CIA's contention that the numbers were higher than MACV believed was not another proof that the Agency took an independent line for partisan purposes.

The final two years of Helms's tenure were mercifully free of major disputes with the Nixon administration over intelligence judgments. By this time the NSC Staff had established channels through which the bulk of

CIA's production in support of White House policy was required to move. Following the dispute over the SS-9, which the Kissinger staff felt itself called upon to resolve by examining the intelligence evidence at length, a new format for estimates on Soviet military capabilities was required of the intelligence community. This format included a series of optional analyses and exhaustive displays of the evidence underlying each judgment. A similar mode of presentation was expected for CIA intelligence memoranda. Helms tried to tailor Agency papers accordingly. On one occasion he cautioned his lieutenants that a particular study on Latin America was "a bit thin on facts substantiating conclusions—a matter on which we have had some carping from the White House."[83] But the White House apparently wanted it both ways. Only shortly before, Helms had admonished OCI for using the phrase "we have no evidence." The NSC Staff complains, he said, that CIA shirks its duty in not making a judgment even in the absence of evidence.[84]

In his years as DCI, Helms witnessed the collapse of the foreign policy consensus on which the Agency's role as gatherer and disseminator of intelligence was based. Amid the intense interbureaucratic disputes of the Johnson and Nixon years, the CIA's contribution might well have become irrelevant, even unwelcome to policymakers. Helms recognized that the Agency's survival depended on his ability to maintain its position in the policy process, and he struggled to keep CIA's output responsive to the changing and often conflicting demands of the White House and Cabinet departments. Nixon's deep mistrust of dissenters within his own administration made this task more difficult, and Helms had to be careful not to appear committed to positions opposed by the White House. Often this meant retreating from judgments painstakingly developed by Agency analysts. In making such compromises, Helms made the greater good of the Agency his first priority.

[83]DCI Chronological File, 27 April 1971.
[84]*Ibid.*

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Chapter 3

Helms's Management Style: Indochina and Operations

Russell Jack Smith

Richard Helms served as DCI during a controversial period of recent history. The Vietnam war and the revelations disclosed by the Watergate scandals remain subjects of fierce debate among historians and former government officials. Helms's role as chief manager of numerous covert operations during this period has also been disputed. Critics charge him with emphasizing clandestine operations at the expense of intelligence, with favoritism toward OSS cronies, and with mismanaging operations in Laos and Vietnam. This chapter gives the perspective of officers mostly below the Agency's top echelons who served under Helms during those years.

For many CIA officers during the 1950s and 1960s, Helms was the quintessential Clandestine Services officer.[1] Quiet, contained, and serious, he seemed to embody the key attributes of a new breed of American bureaucrat, the professional intelligence officer. Through personal example and the daily administration of clandestine activities, he established a standard of style and performance that young officers entering the Clandestine Services found admirable and worth emulating. The challenges the Agency faced during the Johnson and Nixon administrations strained Helms's bureaucratic skills. As younger officers watched Helms cope with the repercussions of Vietnam and Watergate their respect deepened.

[1]Clandestine Services was an alternate name for Directorate of Plans.

One such young officer, Clifton R. Strathern, recalls that when he joined the Agency in 1951 Helms "was already a dominant factor":

> We grew up with the fact that Mr. Helms was a very decisive element. In most instances, in the early stages of your career, you found that he was the one that made the decisions. . . . I can remember as a youngster being pretty much in awe of this man, apparently because of his very intense demeanor at that time. He, I'm sure, had a very active sense of humor but on young officers those rays never fell.[2]

Strathern's account of his first face-to-face encounter with Helms illustrates both the future Director's standards of performance and the manner in which he impressed on young subordinates his demand for excellence. Strathern reported to Headquarters after spending his first three years with the Agency overseas. Soon after, his supervisor assigned him to coordinate and clear for release a long cable [redacted] a chore that required approvals from officers in departments scattered across the Agency's Foggy Bottom compound. When he arrived at Helms's office, he was met with the command, "Read it!" "I was terrified," Strathern recalls. "I started in a quaking voice to read this cable, not really knowing whether to start with the heading or where to start." He had begun to read when the phone rang. This was Strathern's first exposure to the pressures of Headquarters, and his alarm mounted rapidly as Helms dealt with the call. Helms listened briefly, pronounced "a fairly firm expletive," and then told his caller, "I said, *no!* I said no before, and it's still no." Slamming down the phone, Helms reached over the desk, snatched the cable, and said "I'll read it myself!" Certain his career was finished, Strathern listened as Helms castigated both the cable and its author. "Have him rewrite it," he snapped, "and when he can learn to write English, bring it back." This encounter gave Strathern a new respect for Helms's reputation as the best cable writer in the Agency.[3]

In addition to his demand for excellence in performance, Helms possessed two other qualities that particularly impressed young officers: intense dedication to the job and an almost spartan lack of ostentation. Strathern speaks in awe of the long hours Helms worked. "He was always there. Whenever you had to get Mr. Helms, he was there." Unconcerned for the trappings of office, he drove a dilapidated Plymouth to work. "You could actually hear this car from a distance, it was such an old wreck. And everyone, you know, was very impressed with that fact."[4] As Strathern recalls it, Helms's dedication was contagious. "I think it's perhaps one of those characteristics that really rubbed off on the case officers of that

[2]Clifton Strathern, interview by R. J. Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 7 April 1983 (hereafter cited as Strathern interview, 7 April 1983).
[3]*Ibid.*
[4]*Ibid.*

period, that sort of grew up under him. They first of all were taught the kinds of discipline that he expected, and you knew that you couldn't get by with anything less than 150 percent."[5]

Although he insisted on excellence, Helms was no martinet. If he demanded top-level performance, he also recognized it when his subordinates delivered it and was quick to offer a compliment or, occasionally, a promotion. Strathern balances the story of his first encounter with Helms with an account of his promotion to GS-16. In the late 1960s he was responsible for operations in Laos and frequently put in 60- or 70-hour workweeks answering to a galaxy of intergovernmental committees. Nonetheless, he was passed over by the annual promotion list. When he and another rising young star, [redacted] inquired as to the reason, they were told that they were too young and had not served long enough in grade. The two men rejected these criteria, arguing that merit and performance ought to be determining. A promotions panel listened to their objections and presented a second list, with their names on it, to Helms. A few weeks later, Strathern was surprised to receive a phone call from the DCI. "Cliff," Helms said, "I just wanted to tell you how delighted I am that you got your GS-16." He went on for "upwards of 15 minutes, thanking me for all the things I had done to help support him. I was just absolutely astounded." For Strathern, this epitomized Helms. "That impression of Mr. Helms never left me, that he was always prepared to at least reward someone who made the effort. . . . That has to be a lasting impression of Dick Helms as Director. "[6]

Not all CIA officers, of course, were as respectful. To many, Helms was a rival for advancement, and to others, a tenacious bureaucratic adversary. William Nelson remembers an occasion when Helms was Deputy Director for Plans (DDP). He had called a meeting of [redacted] officers to consider a covert action that "all of us at the working level thought was a terrible idea."

> We went in and told [Helms] . . . we thought it was a terrible idea but no, he was going to do it. So he went ahead and did it and it turned out to be a disaster. . . . But about a week after this operation hit the fan, Dick called a meeting of all the same people who had been involved in the previous decision and he went around the room and with great dexterity decapitated everybody there. And the outcome was, the only man who had not made a wrong judgment was Dick Helms.

It was, Nelson concedes, "a masterful tour de force, the way he went about it. It was such a brilliant example of what a great infighter he was.

[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*

you know, with bureaucratic battles. He had an awfully good sense of just how to do those things."[7]

Helms as Manager of Operations

In addition to these elements of personal style, the files from Helms's period as Director and conversations with a number of his top aides reveal other characteristics Helms exhibited in managing the clandestine operations side of CIA. First, he delegated a large measure of daily responsibility for clandestine operations to high-level subordinates; for the most part he intervened directly only when the reputation or security of the Agency was at risk. Secondly, he devoted a considerable part of his energy to personnel matters—selecting and placing in key posts officers who could successfully assume the high degree of responsibility he delegated. Thirdly, he preferred and gave a larger share of his personal attention to clandestine intelligence collection—classic espionage—than to covert action, although he acknowledged the importance of covert action operations in support of US policy, especially in wartime. Finally, as DCI, he displayed an acute sensitivity to the pulses and vibrations of the Washington scene and acted with speed and decisiveness to exploit opportunities to enhance the Agency's position and to protect it from emerging dangers.

When asked to characterize Helms's management style, his former associates usually mention first his penchant for delegating responsibility for operations. As George Carver put it, Helms did not try to "micromanage." "Basically, Dick kept control by trusting his subordinates, expecting us to refer to him things that he needed to know or decisions that we felt he really had to make and, within that framework, letting us essentially make our own judgments and do what we wanted to do."[8]

Such an approach suggests the confidence Helms placed in his subordinates—no responsible manager can delegate authority generously unless he has such confidence—and illustrates a second characteristic associated with Helms. William Colby, who served in several senior posts under Helms and later became DCI himself, remembers the strong emphasis Helms put on personnel selection—finding for each job the right man, who could accept responsibility and perform the tasks it brought him. "Dick spent a lot of his thought process thinking about people," Colby has said, adding that Helms was characteristically concerned about who went where, and about how he could help particular officers.[9]

[7]William Nelson, interview by R. J. Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 20 April 1983 (hereafter cited as Nelson interview, 20 April 1983).
[8]George Carver, interview by R. J. Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 25 March 1983 (hereafter cited as Carver interview, 25 March 1983).
[9]William Colby, interview by R. J. Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 18 April 1983 (hereafter cited as Colby interview, 18 April 1983).

For Helms, fitting the right man to the job had been a career-long interest, deepened by years of experience in the Clandestine Services as Chief of Operations and DDP. This interest remained strong when he became DCI, although the daily pressures and responsibilities did not permit the same degree of personal attention to every key assignment. For this he relied heavily on his successive DDPs, Desmond FitzGerald and Thomas Karamessines, delegating to them a major role in screening candidates for these posts. Nelson recalls that as a division chief he would discuss personnel selection in the first instance with Karamessines. After finding one or several promising candidates for a particular post, Karamessines would float their names by Helms. In personnel selection, Nelson recalls, "Tom never did anything without Dick's approval." After Karamessines had consulted Helms, "He wouldn't say, 'Dick doesn't want this fellow to go.' But he would say, 'I think maybe we ought to try somebody else.'"[10] Helms has similar recollections. When matters of assignments came up in his daily meetings with Karamessines, he would make his opinion known. "I knew all the people, and I did continue the policy of signing off on all station chief appointments, so I could see who was going where and if I didn't like it, stop it in time."[11]

Helms's colleagues and subordinates recognized his preference for classic espionage—foreign intelligence—over covert action, and Helms himself agrees. "That's where I started out," he has observed, "it was something that I was more interested in, how you did it and so forth, but this was a personal predilection, temperamental if you like." Even so, Helms readily conceded that covert action had its place among CIA responsibilities. "I truly believe that in wartime or where you have military operations, you ought to push in the stack, everything you can possibly do, and no holds barred—let her go. If fellows are going to lose their lives as privates in the Army or Marines, or airmen in the Air Force or Navy, or anything else, it's at that point, it seems to me, that anything that you can do to help them in the war you ought to do." In peacetime covert action seemed to Helms a dubious option. "I think my reservations about certain types of CA activities had much more to do with other parts of the world [than Vietnam] and other times, and whether we really should be putting in the kind of effort we were putting in."[12]

Colby also felt Helms's interest lay more in espionage than in covert action, where Colby's own interests lay. In Colby's view, this had benefits for CIA, especially in Indochina.

[10]Nelson interview, 20 April 1983.
[11]Richard Helms, interview by R. J. Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 22 June 1983 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 22 June 1983).
[12]Richard Helms, interview by R. J. Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 14 April 1983 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 14 April 1983).

> I think the balance between the two of us was rather good in a sense because I wanted to do the things and he [would] just as soon get rid of them, and that helped us, both to get them started and to get rid of them. That was what we should have done. He was right on that . . . it did expose the Agency too much, and yet in some of the programs there was nobody else to get the damned things going.[13]

Finally, every senior officer who worked with Helms while he was DCI was keenly aware of his sensitivity to the shifting currents of interest and influence throughout official Washington, and to the impact they might have on the Agency. Helms's top criteria for judging intelligence production were its relevance, timeliness, and cogency in relation to the dominant concerns of the White House (especially the President) and the Congress. His standards for clandestine operations were similar. In particular, he was quick to perceive that any kind of operational mixup could create dangers for the Agency if the President were not immediately informed. He displayed equal solicitude toward Congress. "There was one thing . . . that I learned about dealing with Congress," he later remarked:

> [If] you got down there first and told members of your committee of something that had gone sour or gone wrong before they read it in the newspapers or heard about it from somebody else, they could be very understanding and stand with you and help you and so forth, if they felt that they had been taken in and told about this in advance so that they could protect themselves against criticism from the outside. But when they were caught by surprise by one of these things by reading it in the newspaper or being told by somebody, they really could get very flinty indeed.[14]

The files and the recollections of his top officers are filled with instances in which Helms moved with dispatch to head off dangers or to exploit opportunities for the Agency.

Preoccupation With Indochina

The dominance of the war in Indochina over the mind of official Washington grew steadily throughout the 1960s until it came to obsess the capital in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The CIA's daily activities reflected this concern. The Director's calendar was crammed with meetings at the White House, briefings of the Congress, and discussions with top officers—all related to the reports and estimates flooding out of Langley, and to the manifold clandestine operations taking place overseas. In

[13]Colby interview, 18 April 1983.
[14]Helms interview, 14 April 1983.

Vietnam, half a million American troops were fighting Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces. North Vietnamese supply lines ran through Cambodia and Laos, making those "neutral" states important ancillary theaters of combat. CIA officers in Laos had run an operation to arm and train Montagnard tribesmen since the early 1960s.

Consonant with Helms's belief that when the United States found itself in war CIA should do "everything you can possibly do, no holds barred," the Agency ran innumerable operations in Vietnam to which it committed the bulk of its personnel and resources. Besides the usual clandestine intelligence collection, the Agency's contribution to the war effort in Indochina consisted of rural pacification programs, "nation-building" political programs, cross-border sabotage operations, and an array of covert disinformation activities against Hanoi, [redacted] Helms presided over this multifaceted and intricately detailed range of activities in the only way an intelligent executive could: by generous delegation of responsibilities to officers in whom he placed trust.

In most respects Helms oversaw CIA programs in Vietnam in a manner consistent with the management style discussed earlier. The DCI also had to direct and monitor a host of new and continuing operations around the world, but none brought into play the full array of clandestine activity that Indochina demanded. Helms was convinced that CIA had a crucial role to play in Indochina, and this was also where the full glare of White House attention focused.

George Carver, who served as the Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs (SAVA) throughout the Helms regime, observed Helms daily in his role as manager of CIA programs in Indochina. "He was a very, very exacting taskmaster, and he never let anybody doubt as to who had the ultimate responsibility and the concomitant authority," Carver remembers. "But, he was willing to stake out for his senior colleagues a sphere within which they had largely discretionary latitude and then let them go exercise their discretion. If he didn't like what they were doing, he'd get somebody else to do it."[15] Carver explains that Helms was able to proceed in this fashion to a large extent because of his association over many years with the officers to whom he was delegating this responsibility. "I know that in many contexts this would be regarded as a terribly pejorative word," according to Carver, but "you've got to remember the *clubby* atmosphere in which you had a group of people who knew each other well, who were used to working together, within which there was a great bond of mutual respect, and who would take orders or instructions by indirection as well as [directly]."[16] Thomas Karamessines, Helms's Deputy Director for Plans, played a key role in this regard, meeting nearly every morning with the

[15]Carver interview, 25 March 1983.
[16]*Ibid.*

Director and highlighting those decisions on which he needed guidance. Even then he was frequently instructed to use his own judgment on details. Samuel Halpern remembers one occasion when Karamessines returned from discussing the relative merits of some proposed operation with Helms. Halpern was surprised at the DDP's report that Helms was content to let his subordinates decide whether to undertake the operation. "I kind of thought that was strange and I said so. And [Karamessines] said, 'Well, he's very busy with a lot of other things and he said we're big boys and if I think we ought to try it, go ahead and try it. If we don't, forget about it.'"[17]

George Carver

Even though he delegated substantial responsibility to his senior lieutenants, Helms reserved the right to intervene at any point in the planning or implementing of an operation—and often did so. Nelson remembers sometimes being taken by surprise when he accompanied Helms to meetings:

> You were never quite sure how he was going to play it. There were some programs he was for; there were other programs that might even have, to some degree, originated in some fashion within the Agency, which he would allow to go downtown [to the White House], then he'd shoot them down. Or, you know, in a very subtle way, say, "Well, I don't know about this," and take the other side of the case. . . . I think he felt that those things ought to be exposed to those people downtown. They ought to have a chance to look at them. He was going to voice his own feelings about it, along with theirs. But he wasn't going to bottle it up.[18]

To Helms, delegation of immediate responsibility did not mean a surrender of final responsibility. Nor did it mean that blame was heaped on the man responsible for an operation when it went wrong. Helms believed that ultimate responsibility lay with him as Director, and he sought neither to

[17]Samuel Halpern, interview by R. J. Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 12 April 1983 (hereafter cited as Halpern interview, 12 April 1983).
[18]Nelson interview, 20 April 1983.

pass the blame nor to burden his subordinates with the pressure he felt from the White House or elsewhere. To cite one example, the Agency's continuing failure to satisfy White House desires for high-level intelligence about Vietnamese Communist thinking and strategy—intelligence that could be obtained only by penetrating senior circles in Hanoi or the Viet Cong leadership—brought intense Presidential displeasure. This pressure—felt daily by Helms during the Johnson administration—grew even greater in the Nixon years and acquired a mean-spirited vindictiveness. Helms quietly shouldered this rancor himself. "I don't recall that Helms was carrying those particular barbs into work and to us," one subordinate has remembered. "I think he took a lot of it on himself. He didn't pass the heat along as much as you would have expected."[19] Carver makes the same point:

> He exerted the pressure to get all the results we could possibly get, but Dick did us the service of realizing that when we explained the technical, professional difficulty of trying to penetrate a Communist command apparatus . . . we were not trying to throw up excuses for not getting something done and that we were faced with an extraordinarily difficult problem, against which we had very little leverage, and that we were doing the best we possibly could do in a task that was almost impossible to surmount.[20] Halpern adds that "one of the strengths we had in the Agency was that our senior officers really tried to protect their troops and work with their troops. That's why they got the loyalty."[21]

The numerous labor-intensive Agency operations in Vietnam called for the assignment of hundreds of people to the effort. The Clandestine Services were ransacked for people who could be transferred from their home divisions to Far East Division and sent out to Saigon. "The White House," Nelson recalls, especially of the later years, "put down in effect a quota of the people we had to have in the country." Agents taken from [redacted] wound up in remote Vietnamese hamlets.[22] The continuous shuffling of personnel demanded a great deal of Helms's attention. Unable to scrutinize each personnel folder personally, he made certain senior posts were filled by the best people available. "Every important appointment to Vietnam, I gave a lot of personal attention," he later remarked. "I saw no other way to do it. We could do all we could here in Washington to keep the President informed, keep the Cabinet informed, do all those chores we needed to do, but I could see no way that we could make a maximum contribution on the ground unless we sent the very best people we had out there. And that's what we did."[23]

[19] [redacted]

[20] Carver interview, 25 March 1983.
[21] Halpern interview, 12 April 1983.
[22] Nelson interview, 20 April 1983.
[23] Helms interview, 14 April 1983.

Sometimes, in his desire to select people who could best accomplish a particular mission, he found it expedient to make some pretty daring or unorthodox choices. Helms cites the selection of Thomas Polgar as Chief of Station in Saigon as one such instance. It was essential that the CIA Chief of Station work closely and harmoniously with the US Ambassador, Ellsworth Bunker, an elegant, reserved, distinguished gentleman who made firm judgments and stated them with quiet incisiveness. Polgar was a brusque, aggressive man who sometimes rubbed people the wrong way. Helms felt confident that Polgar's competence would overcome the adverse impression Bunker might initially have. "I was mindful of the fact that the minute Bunker saw Polgar he was going to think that I had played a trick on him. That this was not the kind of fellow he'd get along with," Helms has related. "But I knew very well that regardless of what his initial reaction was, that Bunker would come to value Polgar very highly indeed, because Polgar was just the kind of fellow who could keep one foot in the intelligence camp and the other foot in sort of the general intelligence-diplomatic camp and keep the whole thing going."[24]

Because the Chief of Station's post in Saigon was sensitive, a strong and sustained adverse reaction by the ambassador would have seriously damaged both the Agency's reputation and its ability to perform its mission. Moreover, it would probably have come to the attention of the White House and cast doubt on the Agency's commitment to the preeminent task of the day. But confident that he perceived Polgar's abilities accurately, Helms could risk the appointment. It turned out that Helms was right. Polgar went to Saigon, and as Helms had predicted, Bunker soon came to value him highly. "When you sent me out Polgar, I didn't know what in the world you had in mind," Bunker told Helms later, adding with quiet conciseness, "I came to have a great respect for that fellow."[25]

Helms's selections did not always turn out favorably. The judgments involved in placing individuals in sensitive, highly responsible posts—always tricky and subject to human error—are especially difficult in clandestine operations, where instincts are required that are neither definable nor measurable. An officer who serves as long as Helms had in one organization before becoming its director establishes a body of experience about men and jobs that he tends to rely on. If a DCI—or any manager—is asked to choose between two persons, one of whom he has known to carry out sensitive responsibilities successfully in the past and the other whom he knows less about, he will be strongly compelled to select the former. Occasionally, this choice will be a poor one, possibly because the individual has changed over the years, possibly because his success in previous posts rested on qualities other than those required for the job at hand.

[24] *Ibid.*
[25] *Ibid.*

In the eyes of several of Helms's subordinates he developed a tendency in later years to make personnel decisions in the manner just described. One officer, [redacted] who served in the Far East Division, speaks of Helms's inclination to be "too easy on the old hands" and cites an instance in which a veteran case officer became involved in a drunken escapade that created a diplomatic incident in Saigon. The Chief of Station and the top echelon of the Division felt that the officer should be separated from the Agency, but Helms decided against it and reassigned him within Headquarters. [redacted] suggests that the Director "probably had the practical concern that he always had about firing people . . . they would go to the press." In conclusion, he concedes, "Maybe if you add it all up, he did the right thing."[26]

Another subordinate, Halpern, who served as Executive Assistant to DDPs Karamessines and FitzGerald, contends that from the point of view of "the troops" Helms was no different from other senior officers who "refused to believe what the troops were saying." Halpern suggests that, seen from below, Helms and these senior colleagues "made a tremendous number of errors about people" because they "relied for their information . . . basically on their cronies."[27]

In recent years several writers—notably including Helms's successor, James Schlesinger—have charged that CIA in the 1960s and early 1970s was dominated by an "old boys club," a group of cronies who first came together in the Office of Strategic Services. That there should be a core of truth to these suggestions is hardly surprising. In the years after the Agency's creation in 1947 it was inevitable that the CIA's leadership should frequently turn to those most experienced in intelligence matters, the veterans of the OSS. Helms came from this group, and although as Director he naturally looked to his colleagues with proven experience and mettle for assistance, not all of them succeeded in the work he assigned them.

Foreign Intelligence Operations in Vietnam

The demands of Agency covert action programs in Vietnam and the constant need to supply personnel and resources strained Helms's underlying preference for espionage and intelligence collection. Moreover, the pressure for better, more productive intelligence assets was incessant. Johnson, according to Helms, was "demanding to a degree . . . that was hard to imagine. It was a twenty-four-hour-a-day proposition with him."[28]

[redacted]
[redacted] Halpern interview, 12 April 1983.
[28]Helms interview, 14 April 1983.

Nor did the pressure let up with the change of administration in 1969. "Nixon would say, 'Look, don't talk to me about this and that and the other thing, there is only one problem these days in the United States and that's Vietnam.'"[29] Neither President made specific demands about where to place agents or what techniques to employ. What they wanted was results—hard information. "I think it would be fair to say that neither Johnson nor Nixon had a picture in their mind of what espionage or FI operations or anything were like; I mean, except what they had read in novels," Helms relates. "Therefore, they were not ever very specific about that aspect; they wanted to know the results, and therefore what espionage contributed to those results, fine. But they didn't even realize the extent to which we had to fan people out through the countryside and have bases in these outlying provincial districts and so forth" in order to accumulate information.[30]

Moreover, the information the Presidents wanted was hard to get. They wanted to know what the Communist leaders were up to in Vietnam; what their long-range strategic plans were; and what tactics, both political and military, were being readied to carry out those plans. But to penetrate the high councils of a Communist apparatus when one lacks an in-country base is no easy task. Results were skimpy, and frustration levels in both the White House and the DCI's office were high. Years later Carver would recall his own efforts along these lines:

> My preoccupation during the period, aside from getting the proper people assigned to the Vietnam Station, was to try and see if we couldn't get some information about what was going on in North Vietnam. I mean, this was a great blank, and this is where I spent a great deal of my Vietnamese time, trying to figure out ways to do thi[redacted]

Helms remembers the intensity of this problem as well. "I had the bullwhip out all the time on the FE Division, how it was to come up with new ways to try and see if we couldn't find out what the enemy was up to."[32] In spite of these efforts, the results remained meager. "It was a very perplexing problem, which we never really resolved," Carver concedes.[33]

[29]Helms interview, 22 June 1983.
[30]Helms interview, 14 April 1983.
[31]Carver interview, 25 March 1983.
[32]Helms interview, 22 June 1983.
[33]Carver interview, 25 March 1983.

In a 1967 "Eyes Only" memorandum to Colby, Helms revealed his pent-up frustration over the Vietnam problem. Until CIA focused on specifics, the DCI stressed, "we are going to be obliged to continue these hortatory effusions."

> I simply have come to the point where I feel that the American effort in 'pacification' and 'nation building' has become so preoccupied with organization, theory, and guidelines that the best brains, certainly at the Washington level, are not being devoted to the precise task of how the game is to be played. . . . After all, football games are won by teams who understand the mechanics, rather than the theory, of making touchdowns. . . . If this memorandum fills you with irritation, it is not intended so to do. . . . The time is late. We know what our goal is. Let's devote our gray matter to devising and practicing some plays which will work in getting the job done. This should be the year for players, not for cheerleaders.[34]

Such messages had little effect, but from time to time there were minor breakthroughs. One occurred when the OXCART high-speed reconnaissance aircraft brought back the first quality photographs of North Vietnam, an occasion that produced for Helms "almost a feeling of euphoria.'

[redacted] Solid intelligence remained scarce, and direct high-level penetrations were never achieved. As Colby remarks, "We all wished we had better information but I must say I never had a simple way of achieving it. In other words, it was very, very tough."[37] Rueful about the Agency's lack of success in this respect, Helms later observed, "I was willing to do almost anything to get it. . . . In other words, we turned the box out on all the tricks that we could think of to do this, but as I look back on it, it was no great success. . . . A hard nut to crack and we didn't crack it. I think we may have done a slight bruise job on one side of the nut, but that was about all."[38]

Given the almost obsessive urgency first of Johnson and then of Nixon, Helms might have been expected to castigate his subordinates daily about their lack of results. In fact, he did not. Although he declared in no uncertain terms the need for better intelligence, the DCI did not berate his

[34]Helms Memorandum for Chief, FE, 18 January 1967.
[35]Helms interview, 14 April 1983.
[36][redacted]
[37]Colby interview, 18 April 1983.
[38]Helms interview, 14 April 1983.

officers when they were unable to achieve it. Nelson, chief of Far East Division, remembers that "it was very clear that Dick felt we ought to have better access to the high levels in Hanoi than we had."[39] Still, he retained his composure throughout. [redacted] who was working on the Vietnam desk at the time, says:

> He did gently prod us, even not so gently sometimes, to get more penetrations. He wanted us to keep that in mind as a very high priority goal. I don't think he would try to distract us or change our priorities away from the CA sort of thing, or pacification and so on, but he didn't want us to get so involved in pacification that we didn't make our best shot on intelligence.[40]

[redacted] comments point up another enduring problem in Indochina—the difficulty of balancing foreign intelligence and covert action.

Covert Action in Vietnam

The White House's demand for high-level penetration of the Communist command, coupled with Helms' career-long preference for collection operations, made intelligence gathering paramount. But the Agency's commitments to the enormous pacification and other covert action programs, with their omnivorous appetite for people and resources, could not be shirked. [redacted] the strain on the DCI was evident. He describes his "gut feeling" that Helms "looked upon the Vietnam thing as a huge and almost unmanageable burden that had been dumped on him, and it was something that he felt was a huge distraction from the main task of covert operations, which he viewed as collection." Nonetheless, "being the sort of consummate, bureaucratic politician that he was, he . . . loyally tried to do his best in fulfilling the President's, the government's requirements. I think he found it terribly frustrating."[41] Nelson expresses similar thoughts. "I think he had problems with the Vietnam program and particularly, I suppose, he had some problems with Bill Colby's somewhat evangelical approach to that whole operation."[42] But Helms contradicts these descriptions of his attitude toward CA in Vietnam:

> I did *not* have any feeling that the CA part of Vietnam and Laos was troublesome to me. I was very much in favor of the way we were going about the war in Laos. . . . As for the Vietnamese side of things, the frustration there was this North Vietnamese aspect, the fact that we really couldn't seem to really do anything to shake those fellows. It wasn't that I didn't like what we

[39]Nelson interview, 20 April 1983.
[40][redacted]
[41]*Ibid.*
[42]Nelson interview, 20 April 1983.

> were trying, or didn't want to try new things or other things; it was simply that we weren't getting anywhere with it. . . . I had my heart far more in trying really to do something effective in the CA field than in any other thing during my entire time in the Agency. We were at war, we had something that we were trying to accomplish as a country, and I felt that we should throw in everything we could possibly throw in, whether it was good, bad, or indifferent.[43]

It was this distinction, the wartime use of covert action as opposed to peacetime uses, that made the heavy burden of the CA programs in Vietnam more acceptable to Helms.

One organizational innovation that made the burden more tolerable was the position of Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs (SAVA), occupied first by Peer DeSilva and later by Carver. DCI William Raborn had created the post, and initially Helms, who distrusted organizational gimmicks, was not enthusiastic. But he came to recognize the advantages it had in centralizing for him the multitudinous and disparate demands posed by Vietnam, especially in controlling the massive flow of cables, dispatches, and memoranda. Under Carver, the post and its staff burgeoned.

While Helms found the Carver operation immensely supportive and useful in every respect, this view was not entirely shared within the Far East Division and the top command of the Directorate of Plans. No line officer enjoys the intervention of a staff officer between him and his commander. In this instance, Carver's energy and personal style may have added another element of resistance. "Carver was so fast moving and bureaucratically so adept in filling all the available space that sometimes he left others very much out of joint," [redacted] remembers.[44] Halpern had much the same reaction. "George . . . was a thorn in the side, not all the time, but lots of the time." Carver was always "pushing, pushing, pushing for more and more information, to control almost everything about Vietnam up in that one little spot." Eventually, Halpern concluded, even Karamessines came to resent SAVA's assertiveness. "From Tom's point of view, he had a Vietnam desk, you know, a big Vietnam desk, and a big Vietnam station, and he didn't need someone else to try and run it for him."[45]

Still, Halpern recognizes that the arrangement had its advantages, particularly in dealing with people and offices outside CIA. Agency friends on Capitol Hill, he notes, found the arrangement especially congenial.[46]

[43]Helms interview, 14 April 1983.
[44][redacted]
[45]Halpern interview, 12 April 1983.
[46]*Ibid.*

And [redacted] final judgment is equally balanced. "I could see that the kind of job he was performing for the Director was extremely useful." The SAVA position enabled the DCI to:

> get a quick reaction from any element of the Agency . . . whereas under normal organizational procedures it would be very difficult to get the kind of reaction that he wanted to have, or had to have to deal with the questions from the Secretary of Defense, or the President's, on this very complex and involved program. . . . George was extremely useful to [Helms] but a hair shirt for the rest of us.[47]

Helms fully recognized the friction created by this organizational arrangement and its zealous occupant. Even so, he felt that the benefits he derived from it—notably an ability to stay on top of an unwieldy, sprawling problem—more than compensated for the difficulties:

> Whereas I may not have been entirely enthusiastic about the setting up of the DeSilva unit at the time I was DDCI, I realized that it was going to be impossible for me as Director of Central Intelligence to carry out all the responsibilities of that office and still spend 24 hours a day on Vietnam, which is what President Johnson wanted everybody to do. So it seemed only sensible to maintain the outfit . . . expand it and make the head of it responsible for the DCI's brief on Vietnam, in an effort to help him, not to cut across DDI, or DDP, or anybody else in the Agency, but to help put the information which was flowing out in great quantities into manageable form, to write papers for me of presentations that I had to make on an hour's notice, and things of this kind.

Nor does he, in retrospect, have any doubts about his selection of Carver to run the office. "I must say that Carver did an absolutely superb job in this as Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs. He worked long hours, he was bright, he was fast. . . . [T]o the extent that he may have irritated some people in the Agency, he still seemed to get along reasonably well and get the information he needed."[48]

Covert Action in Laos

In the opinion of many officers in the CIA Clandestine Services the paramilitary programs that the Agency operated in Laos between 1963-71 were the most successful ever mounted. Small in numbers of personnel and even smaller in relative dollar costs, the CIA Laos operations shone in contrast to the ponderous operations of the US military forces in Vietnam. Laos was one covert action program that Helms approved of wholeheartedly:

[47] [redacted]
[48] Helms interview, 14 April 1983.

"I was very much in favor of the way we were going about the war in Laos. I think the Agency had really an extraordinary success if you look at it in any objective terms."[49]

The DCI's support for the Laos program was highly visible to the Far East Division and a source of assurance. As Nelson, Colby's successor as chief of the division, remembers:

> He was terribly interested in the Lao program, particularly the Meo guerrilla activity, and he spent a great deal of time on that, which seemed to me to be a subject of genuine interest to him. He wanted to support it. . . . I certainly had the impression that he felt that this was the way to go in an operation of this sort and not the massive introduction of US forces and whatnot that occurred in Vietnam. I think he took particular pride in that program. You could tell it was sort of his baby, you know, and he was doing a good thing here and he was not spending . . . comparatively speaking, to what the government was spending in Vietnam, you know, the whole damn program was peanuts.[50]

Agency involvement in Laos predated Helms's tenure as DCI by several years. Shortly after the signing of the 1962 Geneva accords, which pledged both East and West not to intervene in Laos with their own forces, the National Security Council assigned CIA responsibility for the training of Laotian tribal military units.[51] By the late 1960s these CIA-backed hill tribes were providing active support for US military operations in South Vietnam by disrupting North Vietnamese Army use of the supply corridor through Laos to South Vietnam, tying down North Vietnamese Army units in Laos seeking to keep the supply lines open, and collecting intelligence on North Vietnamese troops and materiel moving into South Vietnam through the Lao corridor. By 1968, Agency programs had trained and equipped 39,500 Lao irregulars, who were successfully mounting approximately 200 harassing attacks per month. To meet the challenges of these irregulars, the North Vietnamese had been obliged to increase their forces in Laos from 44,000 in 1966 to 100,000 in 1968. CIA, in contrast, had approximately [redacted] staff and contract personnel in-country.[52]

By the early 1970s, however, Helms concluded that the Laos show had become too large, expensive, and controversial to remain a covert action. When friendly Senators like Russell Long offered similar advice, Helms began to look for ways to put the burden down. As Strathern was preparing [redacted] he was summoned to

[49] *Ibid.*
[50] Nelson interview, 20 April 1983.
[51] NSAM Directive of 25 June 1963.
[52] August 1968 DDP memorandum for a Bureau of the Budget review.

the Director's office. He sensed something unusual was in the offing. Helms "called me in and he closed the door and said, 'I want to talk to you and I want to talk to you very frankly.'" The DCI "normally is a man that looks you right in the eye; you feel the full weight of whatever it is that he is trying to tell you. This time he opened the discussion by saying, 'I'd like to philosophize a little bit.' And he turned his chair and he looked out his office windows, out over the Potomac." Clearly troubled by the unwanted burden Laos had become, the Director, more to himself than to Strathern, asked a series of broad questions: "Where are we going in Laos? What should we be doing?" And with that, he and Strathern "began to philosophize in terms of the Agency's role—not just counterinsurgency but what had become a protracted involvement at great expense. Was the Agency really, you know, established to run this kind of logistic problem? Enormous problems of simply providing the weaponry, the ammunition, and calling in airstrikes. And here we were involved in what amounted to a full-fledged war." The contrast with Helms's standard way of conducting business made a deep impression on Strathern. Normally, he relates, one went into the Director's office; one said what needed to be said; one received instructions; and one left. There was little wasted effort or perfunctory conversation. But this time was different:

> He clearly was terribly pensive, and he was terribly concerned about the role of the Agency, continuing to get black marks for its involvement, and the fact that it was becoming public. All this, I think, certainly bothered him, and he knew that the Agency was going to get hurt unless it got out.[53]

The outcome of this unusual discussion was that Strathern left with firm instructions to find ways and means to separate the Agency from the Laos paramilitary program and to turn its responsibilities over to Army Gen. John Vessey. [redacted]he set to work overseeing the Agency's phaseout, "and finding a way to gracefully extract ourselves without simply pulling the carpet out from under our Lao friends." Together, Strathern and Vessey worked out a smooth transition. "We slowly built our position to the point where, without loss of momentum, we could phase in Jack Vessey's organization and phase ourselves out of major weapons procurement and all that." In Strathern's view, Helms's decision to terminate the Agency's program was both timely and prudent. "We got ourselves out of the war at a [good] time. And it was Helms's sensitivities that moved us in that direction. It wasn't that we went right up till the final day and then were blown right out of there."[54]

[53]Strathern interview, 7 April 1983.
[54]*Ibid.*

Meeting High-Level Priorities

Every senior Agency officer during Helms's tenure as Director was keenly aware of Helms's sensitivity to the needs and concerns of those elements of the government whose good opinion was most vital to CIA. At times he seemed capable of sensing a desire for intelligence information or analysis on the part of the White House or the Congress almost before those entities themselves felt the need. He was equally keen in scenting dangers or threats to the well-being of the Agency.

It was Helms's relationship with Congress and the several Congressional committees that most compelled Strathern's admiration: "I would say that Helms's style, his ability to be sensitive to the direction and the will and the spirit [of Congress] was uncanny. . . . Helms clearly knew his Congress, and he knew the people that were involved; he knew the people in the oversight committee; and his sensitivity was finely honed in all that regard."[55] Strathern watched Helms put that sensitivity to good use, not only in selecting the substance of briefing materials for specific committees and even specific Congressmen, but also in setting the style of those presentations. One memorable incident involved the briefing of a senior Southern Senator whom Helms regarded as friendly but not bright. Strathern produced a first try at a briefing paper. Helms sent it back with an admonition. "No, no, no, this is far too complicated. I want this to be as simple as you can make it." Strathern dumbed it down to a point where he would have been ashamed to give it to anyone:

> I had the feeling that I was insulting someone's intelligence, and I sent it back up, thinking, well certainly this is probably going to be bounced because it has simply gone too far the other way. It was sent back to me that I clearly didn't really understand what was needed. The instructions I got were, start with sort of a statement: "That is a cat, the cat is black," and if you can capture that in the briefing, then you've got it. I went back and reduced this briefing to an elementary level that I was sure would never be accepted, and lo and behold, that was exactly what Mr. Helms wanted for that purpose.[56]

Simplicity and the shearing away of unnecessary detail and clutter was a cardinal principle for Helms. Strathern came to realize that for Helms there were times when too much precision and detail were counterproductive. Getting across the essence of the matter in easily grasped terms was the objective. But because the heart of the problem was presented with clarity, his listeners had no feeling that the truth was being masked, and, as Strathern says, "that particular ability of Dick Helms never undermined his credibility."

[55] *Ibid.*
[56] *Ibid.*

Reinforcing that credibility was an ability to perceive when great precision was required and then to insist upon it.

While Helms recognized that absolute precision was not always essential, "it was essential to be precise when you had to be precise. He was unforgiving for inaccuracy in that way . . . as opposed to the person who always must have a precise bottom-line figure down to thirty-five cents. That didn't become essential to most of his briefings, but when it was important, he expected it to be correct." Helms did not train a generation of officers, Strathern concludes, who believed "'well, if you get a range figure of plus or minus five, you're all right.' You had to understand what the right figure was and then you had to fit it to the purpose and make sure there was no possibility of its being misunderstood."[57] This insistence on absolute accuracy, combined with an ability to prune away the nonessentials so that the core could be perceived, established for Helms a reputation for integrity within the halls of Congress that few other Directors approached.

The personalities of Nixon and Kissinger severely challenged Helms's ability to respond sensitively to the needs of the White House.

Perhaps nowhere was Helms's alertness to threats to the Agency's well-being better illustrated than in an episode known alternatively as the Chuyen affair or the Green Beret affair. A US Army Special Forces intelligence unit engaged in running South Vietnamese agents discovered that the North Vietnamese had doubled one of its assets, a man named Chuyen. After brief discussion with officers at the CIA base in Nha Trang, the Green Berets executed the agent, apparently by shoving him out of an airplane over the South China Sea—an action later referred to as "termination with extreme prejudice."

[57] *Ibid.*
[58] Halpern interview, 12 April 1983.

By the summer of 1969 rumors of the execution had leaked to the US press, which had by then become critical of US involvement in Vietnam. Almost immediately a storm of criticism broke. Fortunately for Helms, CIA's participation in the affair had been minimal. Green Beret officers later stated that in their discussions with the CIA base at Nha Trang they had received an indirect suggestion that termination of the agent was indicated, possibly with "extreme prejudice" (a phrase, by the way, not in CIA terminology). They also noted that they had asked directly for advice about the execution before proceeding; when no immediate response from CIA was forthcoming, they took silence as assent. CIA base officers, subsequent investigations disclosed, probably did agree that termination of the agent's services was indicated, but they resolutely maintained that execution had not been intended. As for their failure to respond to the Green Beret request for advice, the Station Chief in Saigon had replied to the query and advised against execution. Owing to a bureaucratic snarl, however, the incoming message reached him belatedly, and his reply arrived hours after the agent had been killed.

Helms acted quickly after the news broke, acquiring accurate information with which to dispel charges that CIA was responsible and then informing the White House and the Congress precisely what had occurred. Nelson remembers that Helms was "awfully goosey about it." The DCI involved himself "in every minute of it. He followed that one very closely. As I recollect, he had all kinds of meetings in his office, all kinds of pressure on the field, to come up exactly with who said what to whom and what happened. And [he] helped to draft and reviewed everything that went down to the White House or the Pentagon on that one."[59]

Halpern, from his post as executive assistant for DDP Karamessines, watched as the Far East Division responded to the Director's demands: "Dick's role in that basically was to try to keep Nixon and Kissinger happy with information. We poured stuff out to both of them by the reams." No detail was too small. At one point, Halpern personally walked a cable over to the White House and sat there while White House communicators sent it out to Nixon, vacationing in California. "Messages were coming in, people were sent out to Vietnam to interview all of our officers and what have you. And it was almost like a My Lai massacre kind of investigation, as to just what the role of CIA was in this, and the specific officers involved." Halpern emphasizes that the purpose of this hectic activity was precisely focused: "Dick was interested in this basically because of [its] political impact, and the flak he would take from the White House" and Capitol Hill. "Dick was very, very concerned that we clear our skirts on this one, that we were not the people who instigated this 'termination with extreme prejudice.'"[60]

[59]Nelson interview, 20 April 1983.
[60]Halpern interview, 12 April 1983.

CIA's skirts were cleared on the Green Beret case, thanks in part to Helms's prompt and effective action. But this was not the end of it, Carver recalls. Once he became convinced that no CIA officer had acted wrongly during the episode, the DCI "was determined not to hang anybody, just to show to the rest of Washington that he was prepared to be a hanging judge. And he took a great deal of obloquy because he was trying to be fair, internally, with his own troops. It was a very difficult period."[61]

Carver's words could just as easily have been applied to the whole period of American involvement in Indochina. Just as the war challenged American wisdom, power, and resolve, so did it test the Agency's ability to adapt to novel situations, some of which had little relationship to the original purposes for which the organization had been created. That the Agency's record in rising to this challenge is somewhat mixed is hardly surprising. That it could have performed far worse is indisputable. In meeting this challenge, Helms set an example of grace under pressure.

[61]Carver interview, 25 March 1983.

Chapter 4

The 1970 Chilean Presidential Election

Robert M. Hathaway

Many of the troubles that plagued Richard Helms in the years immediately after he retired as Director of Central Intelligence stemmed from CIA's involvement in Chile between 1970 and 1973. In a sense Helms fell victim to an ex post facto judgment, for the political climate of 1970 was far different from that of even four or five years later. In 1970, Richard Nixon presided over an administration that jealously guarded its foreign policy prerogatives and brooked little interference by Congress. Over the next few years, however, Watergate undermined the authority of the presidency, Vietnam shredded the consensus that had supported the country's foreign policy for a generation, impending impeachment drove Nixon from the White House, and new interpretations of senior officials' accountability to the President and the Congress came to prevail. Indeed, Congress asserted an initiative and authority in American foreign policy that it had not exercised since before World War II. Ultimately, Richard Helms fell victim to the changed standards dividing these two eras, having performed according to the policies and practices of the earlier period, but judged by those of the latter. Helms's problems after 1973 reflect the ambiguities generated by this mid-1970s' transformation of American political attitudes.

The 1970 Election: "Spoiling Operations"

For almost four decades before its 1970 presidential election, Chile had been notably devoted to civilian democratic rule and free from the periodic coups that dotted its neighbors' histories.[1] In 1970 the Andean nation enjoyed a vigorous multi-party system under a Constitution that commanded respect from all sectors of society. Since his election in 1964, Chilean President Eduardo Frei Montalva had worked hard to reinforce this

[1]From 1818 to 1970 Chile suffered only three brief interruptions to its democratic tradition.

allegiance to constitutional procedures by numerous measures designed to benefit the poorest classes. For six years Frei's government had been the showpiece of the Alliance for Progress, and in the Alliance years the United States had spent more aid money per capita in Chile than anywhere else in the hemisphere. Nevertheless, all was not well in Chile. Frei's inability to satisfy fully the expectations he had raised introduced a new and potentially disruptive polarization into Chilean politics, as his moderate Christian Democratic Party suffered defections from both its left and right wings. It was the intensified radicalism accompanying these developments that first attracted Washington's attention to Chile's 1970 presidential election.

The Nixon administration's decision for a covert CIA role in the 1970 campaign continued the practice of the preceding Kennedy and Johnson administrations, which for nearly a decade had directed clandestine Agency actions in Chilean electoral politics. During Chile's 1964 presidential contest, for example, CIA had channeled $3 million into the coffers of the eventual victor, Christian Democrat Frei. A year later the Santiago Station, working closely with the American Ambassador, used covert funds to help defeat as many as 13 leftist candidates who might otherwise have won congressional seats. In 1969, CIA operatives spent several hundred thousand dollars opposing congressional candidates allied with Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens, an avowed Marxist and founding member of the Chilean Socialist Party. In addition to funding political parties secretly, the Agency had carried out extensive propaganda activities and subsidized anti-leftist newspapers and radio commentators.[2]

Chile's 1970 presidential election developed into a three-cornered contest. Representing the right as candidate of the National Party was 74-year-old Jorge Alessandri Rodriguez, who had been an incorruptible and relatively popular President from 1958 to 1964. Since under the Chilean constitution President Frei could not seek reelection, the Christian Democrats had nominated Radomiro Tomic Romero from the left wing of the party. Allende was the candidate of a coalition of Marxist and other leftwing parties. Of the three contenders, the United States clearly preferred the election of either Tomic or Alessandri, since Allende's promises of sweeping agricultural and industrial nationalization and expanded relations with Communist countries appeared contrary to American political, economic, and ideological interests.

On several occasions in the previous 18 months, most notably in the 303 Committee meeting of 15 April 1969, Agency officers warned the new Nixon administration that preparations would have to begin soon if the

[2]US Congress, Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church committee), *Hearings: Covert Action*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., vol. 7, December 1975 (hereafter cited as Church committee, *Covert Action*), pp. 14-19.

United States hoped to play a significant clandestine role in the 1970 Chilean elections.[3] Helms warned Henry Kissinger, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs and 303 Committee chairman, that CIA would need an early start to repeat its successes of the 1964 Chilean elections. Kissinger deferred the question, and the record clearly indicates that neither Nixon nor Kissinger appreciated the urgency of the situation. Recalling in later years the administration's failure to act on these warnings, Helms repeatedly emphasized the seriousness of this mistake:

> There was no question about it. If one is going to get into covert political action, particularly involved with elections in anything approximating the democratic process, one's got to be in there very early because it takes time to put in the plumbing, to get the agents, to get the conduits set up, and all of those things which help to give you the leverage to affect the election.[4]

In the months following the 303 Committee's 15 April meeting, the Agency maintained a low-level covert action campaign designed to fragment the Chilean Left. Although the Santiago Embassy and CIA Station submitted a joint proposal for anti-Allende electoral activity in December 1969, senior administration officials did not focus on the problem until 25 March 1970. At that time the 40 Committee, having heard DCI Helms warn of Allende's growing strength, authorized only $135,000, to be used for "spoiling operations" against the socialist leader and his Popular Unity party, primarily in the form of propaganda.[5] At the State Department's insistence, however, the 40 Committee specifically prohibited support for any particular candidate. Three months later, on 27 June 1970, the same body allocated an additional $300,000 for CIA anti-Allende operations.[6]

Under this authorization Agency officers organized an intensive anti-Allende propaganda campaign in the five months before the 4 September balloting. CIA assets provided political commentary and news articles for radio and press placement and distributed more than 3 million posters, leaflets, handbills, newsletters, and books. Sign-painting teams covered the walls of Santiago with anti-Allende slogans. Rightwing women's and

[3]Church committee, *Covert Action*, p. 42; US Congress, Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (Church committee), *Interim Report, Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., November 1975 (hereafter cited as Church committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*), p. 229. The 303 Committee was then the Executive decisionmaking body on covert action.
[4]Richard Helms, interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 15 June 1983 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 15 June 1983)
[5]Established by National Security Defense Memorandum (NSDM) 40 in February 1970, the 40 Committee replaced the 303 Committee as the Executive review body for covert action. Its members included the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the DCI.
[6]Church committee, *Covert Action*, pp. 20-21.

"civic action" groups received subsidies to spread the message that a vote for the left would bring irreparable harm to Chilean democracy. A CIA-coordinated propaganda campaign equated an Allende victory with violence and Stalinist repression. Religion and family life were said to be threatened. Political action, including black propaganda, was used to try to split the Allende coalition. Unlike its work in the 1964 elections, however, the Agency refrained from [redacted] and grass roots organizing, and provided no direct funding for any candidate.[7]

CIA's actions remained unknown to the American business community, which meanwhile had become increasingly alarmed by the prospects of a leftist victory in Latin America. In mid-June 1970, [redacted] contacted Helms to urge direct financial assistance to the Alessandri campaign. Reporting to Kissinger on this conversation, the DCI expressed skepticism about the impact such aid would have, given the "diffuse" character of Alessandri's political organization. The election remained "dicey and difficult to figure," Helms noted. The Agency would continue to follow events closely, "but it is only fair to say that we are in a quandary as to what action is wise."[8]

International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT), one of the largest American multinational corporations with holdings in Chile, also moved to block an Allende triumph. On several occasions in May and June, John McCone, a former DCI and a member of ITT's board of directors, met with Helms to discuss the Chilean situation. Helms told McCone that, while the 40 Committee was monitoring events in Chile, it had decided to avoid the massive commitment of resources made in 1964. He did concede, however, that the CIA was not following a total hands-off policy.

Unsatisfied with Helms's assurances, McCone asked the DCI to send an Agency representative to talk with Harold Geneen, ITT's chief executive officer. Accordingly, William Broe, head of DDP's Western Hemisphere (WH) Division, conferred with Geneen in a Washington hotel on 16 July. Geneen asked about the Agency's analysis of the electoral situation and offered to give CIA a "substantial" fund to pass along to Alessandri. Although Broe turned down Geneen's offer, repeating the 40 Committee's prohibition against backing a specific candidate, he encouraged the ITT president to provide this support directly.[9]

Maintaining a totally aloof attitude had hazards of its own. The last thing Helms wanted was for ITT [redacted] to complain to their White House friends that the Agency refused to cooperate on Chile. Although

[7]Church committee, *Covert Action*, chaps. II and III, *passim*.
[8]Richard Helms, DCI, Memorandum for Henry Kissinger, 16 June 1970.
[9]US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on Multinational Corporations, *Hearings: Multinational Corporations and United States Foreign Policy*, 93rd Cong., 1st sess., (Washington, DC: GPO, 1973) (hereafter cited as *Hearings, ITT and Chile*), pp. 3-4; Memorandum, "Policy Decisions Related to Our Covert Action Involvement in the September 1970 Chilean Presidential Election," 9 October 1970.

complying with the letter of their instructions, Agency officers in Santiago over the next five or six weeks met several times with ITT representatives to offer suggestions and supply names of Chileans who might help funnel ITT's funds to the Alessandri campaign. Guided by CIA advice, ITT ultimately passed approximately $350,000 to the National Party. As an internal Agency memorandum noted, this action "was taken without reference to the Department of State for obvious reasons."[10]

On 21 July, the DI's Office of Current Intelligence (OCI) produced a memorandum on the election, which indicated that Allende and Alessandri were neck and neck, with neither likely to secure a majority of the votes. Allende could well end up as president. At the morning meeting the following day Helms urged the Deputy Director for Plans, Thomas Karamessines, to "ensure that we are doing everything which can reasonably be done" to prevent this. Assuring the DCI that he was following the situation closely, Karamessines explained that "certain actions are already being undertaken to deal with contingencies, which might present themselves following the vote count."[11]

On 30 July the intelligence community published a new National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) entitled *The Outlook for Chile*. While judging Alessandri the current frontrunner, this NIE paralleled OCI's assessment that the election was too close to call. The NIE predicted that Allende could "take Chile a long way down the Marxist-Socialist road during the six years of his administration," ultimately creating "a Chilean version of a Soviet style East European Communist state." Allende's rejection of the capitalist system was "categorical," and he would move quickly to expropriate a number of American business interests in Chile. In foreign affairs, an Allende presidency would create "extremely difficult" problems and "pose a serious challenge to US efforts at securing hemispheric cooperation on a wide range of issues." On timing, however, the NIE held that Allende "would be likely to move cautiously in carrying out drastic changes in institutions," at least initially, since important obstacles remained to impede a radical wider popular base than he currently had.

The NIE also judged that a victory by either Alessandri or Tomic would produce strains in relations between Washington and Santiago, since the Chilean trend toward more independence of the United States was "too deeply set to be easily reversed." The NIE concluded that, all told, "Chilean democracy is likely to survive over the next two or three years."[12]

The degree of concern expressed in this NIE may not have fully reflected Helms's own misgivings over the prospects of an Allende presidency, although the DCI loyally stood by his analysts. Yet reports of funds poured into the Socialist candidate's campaign by the Soviets and the

[10]Post mortem on the Chilean Presidential Election, 12 November 1970.
[11]Morning Meeting Minutes, 21 and 22 July 1970.
[12]NIE 94-70, 30 July 1970.

Cubans—$350,000 from Havana alone, by Agency estimates—raised the specter of a puppet regime manipulated from abroad.[13] Moreover, at just this moment Moscow appeared intent on transforming the Cuban port of Cienfuegos into a base for its nuclear submarine fleet, a development that accented the danger of a Russian presence in the Western Hemisphere.

As predicted, the election was very close. But on 4 September the Chilean electorate handed Dr. Allende a small plurality. The leftist candidate garnered 36.3 percent of the 3 million ballots cast, giving him a 39,000-vote margin over his nearest rival, Alessandri, who was the choice of 34.9 percent of the electorate; Tomic came in third with 27.8 percent of the vote. An alarmed Nixon White House turned angrily on the CIA for failing to prevent Allende's triumph. As Helms recalls it, the President and Kissinger "were obviously upset over Allende's victory, they were looking around for scapegoats, there wasn't any doubt about it. They didn't want to accept the responsibility themselves for not having gotten on with this thing properly." Already suspicious of the Agency, the President saw the outcome of the Chilean election as one more indication of CIA bungling.[14]

Agency officials disagreed. In their view, the White House had risked this outcome from the start by not recognizing the danger that Allende's candidacy posed: Nixon and Kissinger were themselves at fault. Moreover, the State Department's resistance to a more vigorous covert action program had further reduced the already slender chances of success. "The basic problem," an Agency post mortem concluded:

> was that reservations, almost philosophic in depth at times, persisted in the Department of State from the outset and suffocated considerations of a clear-cut, all-out effort to prevent Allende's election. . . . Translated into stark political realities, the issue was that of [the] Department of State being unwilling to consider supporting Jorge Alessandri . . . to whatever extent necessary to assure his election.[15]

Since no candidate had received an absolute majority of the ballots in the 4 September canvass, the Chilean Congress would select the next president from the two individuals with the highest vote counts. The Congress had always chosen the frontrunner in similar past instances, and nearly all observers predicted that when it met on 24 October it would respect precedent and confirm Allende.

Track I and Track II

Now thoroughly aroused, the Nixon administration cast about for ways to block Allende's selection by the Chilean Congress. On 8 September 1970, the 40 Committee convened to consider possible

[13]Church committee, *Covert Action*, p. 20.
[14]Helms interview, 15 June 1983.
[15]Post mortem on the Chilean Presidential Election, 12 November 1970.

strategies. An Agency summary of the meeting notes that "all concerned realized that previous plans . . . would have to be drastically redrawn." DCI Helms reported that the Congress would probably confirm Allende and that, once the Marxist leader was in office, domestic opposition would rapidly collapse. "While not advocating a specific course of action, the Director further observed that a military *golpe* [coup] against Allende would have little chance of success unless undertaken soon." According to the minutes of this meeting, both Kissinger and Attorney General John Mitchell, one of Nixon's most trusted advisers, concurred with this judgment.[16]

A dispatch from the US defense attache in Santiago warned that the Chilean military was "selling out" to Allende. US Ambassador Edward Korry on 12 September cabled that Washington should not expect the Chilean military to move to bar Allende's accession. Agency sources concurred. As a National Security Council staffer informed Kissinger, the CIA had concluded that "*military action is impossible*; the military is incapable and unwilling to seize power. We have no capability to motivate or instigate a coup."[17]

Faced with these discouraging reports, the 40 Committee met again on 14 September. After reviewing the available options, it directed Ambassador Korry and the Agency to augment their political and economic measures with propaganda activities focusing on the unhappy consequences that would follow an Allende takeover. It also approved a contingency fund of $250,000 to swing congressional votes to Alessandri. These steps, designed to induce Allende's opponents to block his assumption of power by either political or military means, would later become known as Track I.[18]

On the following day, 15 September, Helms met with the President in the Oval Office. Kissinger has recalled this conference:

> In a conversation lasting less than 15 minutes Nixon told Helms that he wanted a major effort to see what could be done to prevent Allende's accession to power: If there were one chance in ten of getting rid of Allende we should try it; if Helms needed $10 million he would approve it. Aid programs to Chile should be cut; its economy should be squeezed until it "screamed." Helms should bypass Korry and report directly to the White House.[19]

In those few minutes President Nixon created Track II, the program that later brought so much trouble and attention to Richard Helms and the CIA. Although Kissinger later tended to minimize the importance of this

[16]Memorandum, "Policy Decisions Related to Our Covert Action Involvement in the September 1970 Chilean Presidential Election," 9 October 1970.
[17]Morning Meeting Minutes, 11 September 1970; Church committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, p. 230, italics in original.
[18]Track I comprised all covert activities approved by the 40 Committee, which were designed to induce Allende's opponents in Chile to prevent his assumption of power, either through political or military means. (Church committee, *Covert Action*, p. 23A.)
[19]Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), p. 673.

meeting and the President's directives, Nixon had certainly conveyed to Helms a message of clear and present danger. Testifying several years later before a Congressional committee, the DCI recalled: "The President came down very hard that he wanted something done, and he didn't much care how and that he was prepared to make money available. . . . This was a pretty all-inclusive order."[20] Helms's handwritten notes from this meeting attest to the urgency of his instructions:

> One in 10 chance perhaps, but save Chile!
> worth spending
> not concerned risks involved
> not involvement of Embassy
> $10,000,000 available, more if necessary
> full-time job—best men we have
> game plan
> make the economy scream
> 48 hours for plan of action[21]

The next morning, 16 September, the DCI met with his principal assistants to convey the President's instructions. The mood was somber. As Helms later related, "There wasn't a one of us who thought we had any chance whatever" of preventing Allende's confirmation. The possibility of "bringing off something like this seemed to me at that time to be just as remote as anything could be."[22] But such pessimism went largely unexpressed. One DDP officer, David Phillips, remembers Helms circulating a memorandum to those working on the problem. "This is an assignment we could never have taken on," the DCI reportedly told his troops, "except that I think the Agency has developed the professional ability to carry out whatever instructions are given it." For Phillips, the Director's memo, "in sort of a laconic Helms fashion, conveyed to me at least the thought that he might not think very much of it, but he had been given his marching orders and he was going to carry them out."[23]

Although Helms believed from the beginning that only a move by the Chilean military could effect the President's instructions, it is not clear whether Nixon and Kissinger also held this view at the outset. "All of us were aware," one CIA participant has observed, "that in such a short period of time, no matter what other techniques we might try, what we were talking about, basically, was a military coup."[24] But the Chilean military, with its long tradition of respect for constitutionalism, could not be

[20]Church committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, p. 227.
[21]Report on CIA Chilean Task Force Activities, 18 November 1970.
[22]Richard Helms, interview by David Frost (hereafter cited as Helms interview by Frost) p. 109; Church committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, p. 233.
[23]David A. Phillips, interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 9 June 1983 (hereafter cited as Phillips interview).
[24]*Ibid.*

counted on to stage a coup. Chile's leading military figure, the Commander in Chief of the Army, Gen. Rene Schneider, was outspoken in his conviction that the Chilean military should stay out of politics. The need for speed complicated matters further, since the Chilean Congress would meet to select a new president on 24 October, a date only slightly more than a month away. The absence of readily available assets within Chile presented another obstacle. "We really had to extemporize from the very beginning, and it was an almost impossible situation to deal with," Helms later observed.[25]

When he had tried to point out these difficulties to President Nixon on 15 September, Helms recalls, "that was like talking into a gale. I mean, we were to go out and do the best we could, and that was all there was to it."[26] Helms could do little more than stifle any misgivings he may have possessed. The President was obviously determined to thwart Allende's inauguration, and the DCI's job was to do whatever the White House ordered. Helms has explained:

> I believed the Agency to be a service agency and I think that it is there to try to do what the President wants to have done and needs doing, and that therefore one should give it the best shot that one could . . . and if you weren't successful, all right, you failed, but at least you'd done the best you could and it might have succeeded.[27]

The Agency's efforts to prevent Allende's election thus proceeded along two separate paths—Track I and Track II—although similarities in methods and purposes sometimes obscured the distinction between the two. Both tracks were prepared to sanction all means, including a military coup, necessary to block Allende's inauguration. What came to be called Track I consisted of the covert political, economic, and propaganda activities the 40 Committee approved on 14 September and in later meetings. The Agency worked closely with the State Department on Track I activities, made a show of respecting Chile's constitutional traditions. Although excluded from all knowledge of Track II, US Ambassador Korry was authorized by the 40 Committee to encourage a military coup, so long as President Frei concurred. Track II, on the other hand, rose from Nixon's secret orders to Helms on 15 September. Making no attempt to work through Frei or to stay within Chile's constitutional framework, Track II rapidly focused on a military coup as its principal objective. Track II followed a severely restricted chain of command, with the CIA reporting directly to Kissinger's office in the White House. The State and Defense Departments and the 40 Committee knew nothing at all of Track II, and Ambassador Korry in Santiago received no word of its existence.

[25]Helms interview by Frost, p. 110.
[26]*Ibid.*, p. 109.
[27]Helms interview, 15 June 1983.

Faithfully carrying out the President's wishes, Helms kept the US Congress completely ignorant of Track II. While the situation is murkier with respect to Track I, at most only the chairmen of the armed services and appropriations subcommittees that had jurisdiction over CIA could have had any inkling of this joint effort of CIA and the State Department. In the upper chamber, Senator Richard Russell jealously guarded access to CIA officials, and the DCI invariably sought his approval before briefing other Senators on sensitive matters.[28] But in the autumn of 1970, Russell, gravely ill and only months from death, could not provide his customary guidance. There is, in fact, no evidence that anybody in the Senate was consulted or advised about Track I. On the House side there is also no evidence that, in the crucial weeks between 14 September and 24 October, the Agency briefed either of the designated committee chairmen about Track I. In that era, of course, members of Congress did not expect—or in most cases, wish—to be informed of CIA operational matters. For Helms and his predecessors it would have been most exceptional—indeed, unprecedented—to confer widely with legislators about covert Agency actions.

After setting up a special Track II task force at Headquarters on 16 September, the Deputy Director for Plans cabled David Phillips, [redacted] to head it. Karamessines met with Phillips and Western Hemisphere Division Chief William Broe daily and frequently conferred with Kissinger and other White House officials. Broe remembers that Helms himself took a more active interest in Track II than in any other operation Broe was familiar with. This no doubt reflected Kissinger's intense pressure on the DCI for up-to-the-minute information and results. In his usual fashion, however, Helms generally delegated day-to-day operational responsibilities to his subordinates. [redacted]

Agency Track I efforts assumed a multiplicity of forms. Initial hopes of using the $250,000 made available by the 40 Committee to buy influence in the Chilean Congress were quickly recognized as illusory, so the Station turned to other methods. Agency-generated propaganda appeared throughout Latin America and in many of the major newspapers of Europe and Japan. Alleged parallels between the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in 1948 and the current situation in Chile were widely disseminated. [redacted] urging them to plead with Frei to do whatever was possible to block Allende. Prominent members of the

[28]John M. Maury, Legislative Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 10 June 1969.
[29]Broe interview, 28 June 1983.

European Christian Democratic movement were mobilized to encourage Frei to save Chile from Marxism. [redacted]

Hoping that financial chaos might push the Chilean military into action, Agency officers found Chile's fragile economy an inviting target. On 18 September, Helms and Karamessines met with Kissinger at the White House to consider what economic pressures could be brought to bear against Chile. They apparently discussed a recent ITT offer to turn $1 million of corporate funds over to the CIA for the purpose of blocking Allende's confirmation. On 22 September, Broe met with the head of ITT's Washington office to explore ways the multinational might influence the balloting in the Chilean Congress. A week later, Helms, warning his 40 Committee colleagues that Allende's promises to impose Marxism on Chile must be taken seriously, helped turn back State Department efforts to tone down the economic warfare against Chile. That same day, under instructions from the DCI, Broe journeyed to New York to talk with a senior ITT official. The CIA officer proposed a large-scale program to create economic turmoil in Chile as a way of pressuring the Christian Democrats to vote against Allende, or failing that, to weaken the new government's position. Although Karamessines telephoned McCone to request the former DCI's backing for Broe's scheme, ITT showed little interest in the Agency's proposal. Similarly, CIA's efforts to enlist Anaconda Copper, General Motors, and several other large American corporations with holdings in Chile failed, while attempts to trigger a run on Chilean banks were equally unproductive. Meanwhile, the impending 24 October vote drew steadily closer.

Inquiries, reflecting both Track I and Track II efforts, into possible military action at first proved no more fruitful. Four false-flag operatives—officers posing as nationals of countries other than Chile or the United States—arrived in the country and rapidly established contact with Chilean officers interested in promoting a coup. Agency personnel intimated to certain officers that the United States was willing to support a military solution by all means short of outright armed intervention. A special Headquarters arrangement with the Defense Department [redacted] On 23 September, however, the CIA Station in Santiago reported: "Strong reasons for thinking neither Frei nor Schneider will act. For that reason any scenario in which either has to play

[30]Church committee, *Covert Action*, pp. 24-5.

an active role now appears utterly unrealistic." The need, an Agency post mortem later explained, was to overcome "the apolitical, constitutional-oriented inertia of the Chilean military."[31]

During these weeks many of the CIA's contacts were with officers close to Brig. Gen. Roberto Viaux, who had been retired after launching an unsuccessful coup against President Frei in 1969. That American hopes could be pinned on such a figure—remembered by Phillips years later as "a crazy"—reveals something of the desperation Agency officers felt as the 24 October deadline rapidly approached.[32] Viaux initially asked for a sizable airdrop of arms and ammunition, a request Langley on 6 October denied as impractical. The general did receive a [redacted] token of American good faith and a CIA promise of $250,000 in life insurance. After frequent meetings with Agency operatives in late September and early October, Viaux reported his readiness to stage a coup on the night of 9-10 October. At this point, Karamessines intervened to scotch the proposal. A move by Viaux at this time, Agency officers decided, would not command the support necessary to succeed. It would be better to wait for a more propitious occasion.

It increasingly appeared that such an occasion might never arise. The problem, exasperated CIA officers agreed, was that President Frei was unable or unwilling (or both) to provide the necessary leadership. The Agency's task, one report concluded, "was one of attempting to recast Frei, as a political personality, in a role demanding decisiveness and 'machismo' to a degree that, thus far, had eluded him." After several contacts with Agency officers, this report observed, the Chilean president remained "gracious, understanding, and frank as always, and, as always with him, nothing happened."[33]

On 10 October, with only two weeks to go before the Chilean Congress reconvened, Karamessines reported to Alexander Haig, Kissinger's deputy, that prospects for a coup looked dimmer than ever. On 13 October, Ambassador Korry met first with Kissinger, then Nixon to warn against trying to pull off a coup that was not likely to succeed. The 40 Committee received the diplomat's views the following day, along with Karamessines's assessment, as part of Track I, that a coup climate did not exist. On 15 October the 40 Committee (still unaware of the existence of a second track) called a halt to most Track I activities.

Recollections differ as to what happened next. On 15 October, Karamessines reported privately to Kissinger and Haig on Track II, observing that Viaux had no better than a 1-in-20 chance of bringing off a successful coup. In his memoirs Kissinger has written that he then ordered Track II terminated, and that as far as he and President Nixon were concerned, his order

[31]Church committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, p. 234; Report on CIA Chilean Task Force Activities, 18 November 1970.
[32]Phillips interview, 9 June 1983.
[33]Report on CIA Chilean Task Force Activities, 18 November 1970.

ended all covert activities seeking to prevent Allende's election.[34] If this was Kissinger's intention, it was not understood by Karamessines or the CIA. Karamessines believed that Kissinger had directed him only to discourage Viaux from premature action. On 16 October, instructing the Santiago Station to rein in Viaux, Headquarters added:

> It is firm and continuing policy that Allende be overthrown by a coup. . . . We are to continue to generate maximum pressure toward this end utilizing every appropriate resource. . . . There is great and continuing interest in the activities of [several Chilean conspirators] and we wish them optimum good fortune.[35]

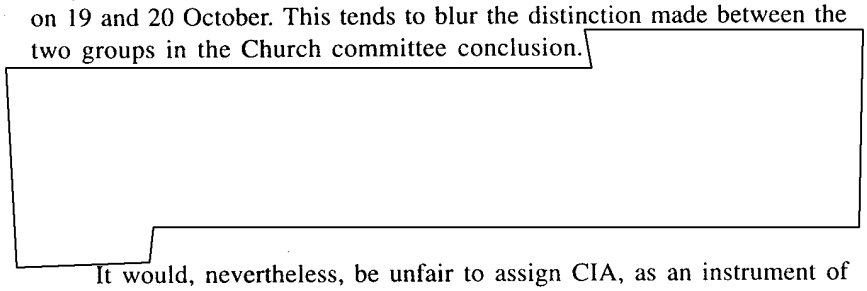
Immediately the pace of events in Chile quickened. A Viaux associate informed his Agency contact that officers around Viaux planned to kidnap General Schneider within the next few days, before launching a full-scale coup. At the same time other Chilean officers with ties to Brig. Gen. Camilo Valenzuela, commander of the Santiago garrison, asked CIA representatives for tear gas grenades, three submachineguns, and ammunition. Having secured an Agency pledge [redacted] for a successful abduction, the Valenzuela group attempted to kidnap Schneider, first on 19 October and then again the next day. Both tries failed. In the early dawn hours of 22 October, with barely two days remaining before the crucial vote, an intermediary delivered the requested machineguns and ammunition to Valenzuela associates. Agency officers were not optimistic. The task force log noted that "the prospect for a coup succeeding or even occurring [*sic*] before 24 October now appears remote."[36]

But before the Valenzuela group could use its newly acquired weapons, Viaux's plotters staged their own attempt to kidnap General Schneider. Although their effort also failed, in the attempt they fatally wounded Schneider. A subsequent investigation by a Congressional committee headed by Senator Frank Church exonerated the Agency of any direct complicity in the general's death:

> Although the CIA continued to support coup plotters up to Schneider's shooting, the record indicates that the CIA had withdrawn active support of the group which carried out the actual kidnap attempt on October 22, which resulted in Schneider's death. Further, it does not appear that any of the equipment supplied by the CIA to coup plotters in Chile was used in the kidnapping. There is no evidence of a plan to kill Schneider or that United States officials specifically anticipated that Schneider would be shot during the abduction.[37]

[34]Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 674, 676.
[35]Cable, Headquarters #802, 16 October 1970.
[36]Chile Logs – Track II, 22 October 1970.
[37]Church committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, p. 5.

This conclusion is certainly warranted, although other evidence suggests that it is narrowly framed. A Chilean military court, for instance, later determined that the Viaux men present at the fatal 22 October abduction attempt had also taken part in the earlier CIA-supported Valenzuela attempts on 19 and 20 October. This tends to blur the distinction made between the two groups in the Church committee conclusion.



It would, nevertheless, be unfair to assign CIA, as an instrument of American policy, principal responsibility for Schneider's death. This burden must properly rest on an administration that insisted on sparing no effort to deny Allende the presidency. A few years later, as he coped with seemingly inexhaustible Church committee demands for Agency documents, an embittered CIA senior officer observed that it was American foreign policy toward Chile that was under examination, not CIA implementation of it. "In an age of gun-boat diplomacy when the US Marines waded ashore in Haiti," he protested, "critics may have deplored US policy, but they did not launch a Congressional investigation of the US Marine Corps."[39]

Time having run out, Agency personnel in Chile began closing down operations in the wake of the bungled abduction attempt. On 23 October, Helms reviewed the situation with his key subordinates. They agreed, the task force log records, that "a maximum effort has been achieved and that now only Chileans themselves can manage a successful coup. The Chileans have been guided to a point where a military solution is at least an option open to them."[40]

Declaring a state of emergency after General Schneider was shot, President Frei gave the military open-ended authority to maintain order. For a brief moment, Headquarters hoped that the dramatic 22 October attack was an opening move in a coup attempt. But the unexpected wounding of Schneider evidently inhibited further action. On 24 October 1970, Salvador Allende received 153 of the 195 votes cast in the Chilean Congress. The next day Schneider died, and on the day after that President Frei and President-elect Allende stood side by side at the general's funeral. On 3 November 1970, Salvador Allende was sworn in as Chile's new president.

[38]"Special Mandate from the President on Chile," CIA Briefing Paper, 15 July 1975; Raymond A. Warren, Memorandum for the Review Staff, 17 January 1976.
[39]John H. Waller, Memorandum for the Review Staff, 4 December 1975.
[40]Chile Logs – Track II, 24 October 1970.

UPI

President Salvador Allende (surrounded by party bodyguard) waves to crowd en route to military parade.

The Fall of Allende

CIA continued to monitor Chilean affairs after Allende's inauguration, and by some measures its interest increased. Within the Western Hemisphere Division, Broe created a separate branch dealing exclusively with Chilean matters, in recognition of the administration's heightened concern. Budgetary figures also reflect this augmented interest. In the months preceding Allende's accession to power, the Agency had spent between $800.000 and $1,000,000 on covert action in Chile. Over the following three years, it would expend nearly $7 million more, the larger part of it before Richard Helms stepped down as DCI. These funds financed extensive clandestine activities, including support for opposition political parties, propaganda operations, and covert backing for private sector organizations and the media.[41]

This extensive involvement logically flowed from the assumptions and commitments behind both Tracks I and II. A memorandum that DDP Karamessines wrote after his 15 October 1970 meeting with Kissinger, when the National Security Adviser directed the Agency to break off ties to

[41]Church committee, *Covert Action*, p. 1.

Viaux, clearly demonstrates this linkage. Karamessines records that Kissinger ended this meeting by noting that the CIA "should continue keeping the pressure on every Allende weak spot in sight—now, after the 24th of October, after 5 November [*sic*; Kissinger probably meant 3 November, inauguration day], and into the future until such time as new marching orders are given."[42] Later, before the Church committee, Karamessines expanded on this:

> As far as I was concerned, Track II was really never ended. What we were told to do in effect was, well, Allende is now President. So Track II, which sought to prevent him from becoming President, was technically out, it was done. But what we were told to do was to continue our effort. Stay alert, and to do what we could to contribute to the eventual achievement of the objectives and purposes of Track II. That being the case, I don't think it is proper to say that Track II was ended.[43]

Karamessines's explanation is misleading, since once Allende was installed, there is no evidence that US policy or CIA action ever had his overthrow as an objective. National Security Decision Memorandum 93, however, gives some background that helps explain the sense in which Karamessines evidently considered Track II still alive. Adopted six days after Allende's inauguration, this document set forth official American policy toward Chile. While the US Government would be publicly "correct but cool" toward the new regime in Santiago, behind the scenes it would seek "to maximize pressures on the Allende government to prevent its consolidation and limit its ability to implement policies contrary to US and hemisphere interests."[44] The Agency's clandestine activities after the installation of the new Chilean leadership appear to have followed this directive, approved at the highest levels of the government.

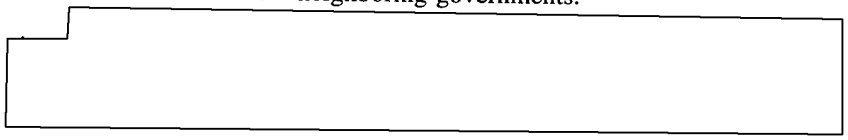
The Agency's efforts to "maximize pressures" on the Allende government, however, did not go so far as actively to promote the coup in September 1973 that toppled President Allende. In this respect Karamessines's ambiguous reference to continuing Track II is seriously misleading. The Church committee, not known for its tenderness toward the CIA, spent months searching for hard evidence of direct American participation in the events leading to Allende's overthrow and death but ultimately failed to produce any. The record, the committee concluded, indicated that CIA maintained "a careful distinction between supporting the opposition parties," on the one hand, and "funding private-sector groups trying to bring about a military coup" on the other.[45]

[42]Thomas Karamessines, Memorandum of Conversation, 15 October 1970.
[43]Church committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, p. 254.
[44]Chile: Operating Directive—FY 72.
[45]Church committee, *Covert Action*, p. 31.

The Senate investigators, however, went on to suggest that the facts before them might not tell the entire story. The committee hypothesized that the United States, "by its previous actions during Track II, its existing general posture of opposition to Allende, and the nature of its contacts with the Chilean military," "probably" promoted the idea among Chile's officer corps that Washington would not be unhappy if a coup occurred. Noting that CIA officials and American military attaches maintained contacts with the Chilean military during the Allende years, ostensibly to collect intelligence, the committee wondered whether these contacts "strayed into encouraging the Chilean military to move against Allende"; or whether the Chilean military "took encouragement to act against the President from those contacts even though U.S. officials did not intend to provide it." American officials in the years before 1973 "may not always have succeeded in walking the thin line between monitoring indigenous coup plotting and actually stimulating it," one of the committee's reports concluded, again expressing a degree of uncertainty rather than rendering a firm judgment.[46]

While these speculations remain unproved, they have a certain plausibility. The committee's generalizations, however, do not attempt to distinguish between Helms's actions as DCI and those of his two successors in 1973, James Schlesinger and William Colby. It is not easy to define with precision CIA's role in Chile under Richard Helms, since he retired as DCI eight months before Allende's government fell in September 1973. Moreover, the very drama of events in Chile in 1973 has colored recollections of the 1971-72 period when Helms was still responsible for the Agency.

Certain facts about the Helms years are a matter of record. We know, for instance, that on 30 October 1970 the Deputy Director for Plans informed the DCI that Allende had met with a number of "hardline leftists" and "promised them everything." A week later, the Director conveyed a similar message in briefing the National Security Council on the new government in Chile. "Let us make no mistake . . ." Helms warned. "This is a hardline, militant cabinet. It reflects the determination of the Socialists to assert their more radical policy from the start." Although Allende had issued a plea for international understanding, he had then appointed a foreign minister who was "so far to the left" that he had even alienated Moscow in the past. Predicting worsening relations between Santiago and Washington, Helms reported that Allende had promised Latin American revolutionaries that Chile would become a center of support for their efforts to overthrow neighboring governments.[47]



[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 28.
[47] Morning Meeting Minutes, 30 October 1970; Memorandum, "Briefing by Richard Helms for NSC," 6 November 1970.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Seeking to translate these broad outlines into policy, the Agency channeled substantial sums to opposition political parties, primarily the Christian Democrats, Alessandri's National Party, and various splinter groups. It subsidized anti-Allende newspapers, most notably *El Mercurio*, and produced books and magazines. It orchestrated a nationwide propaganda campaign and developed material critical of the regime for use by newspapers, radio, and television. [redacted]

[redacted]

Finally, the Santiago Station cultivated contacts within the Chilean military. These contacts kept the Agency abreast of coup planning, but, as the Church committee report suggests, they probably also served to encourage or incite plotting. For instance, the Santiago Station gave a friendly Chilean officer information purporting to document alarming Cuban influence within the Chilean security apparatus, information that, in fact, the CIA had fabricated.[49] [redacted]

[redacted]

[48] [redacted]

[49] Church committee, *Covert Action*, pp. 38-39.

[50] [redacted]

As for CIA's analytical side, the Church committee later noted that a 1971 Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) and a 1972 NIE both used relatively restrained language in characterizing Allende's current policies and future prospects. Observing that Chilean democracy continued to display "a remarkable resiliency," the June 1972 estimate was relatively sanguine about the chances for an "open and meaningful" presidential election at the end of Allende's term in 1976. In foreign affairs, the leftist leader had embraced a "cautious, independent course," expanding relations with other Communist countries more slowly than anticipated and offering only modest help to groups seeking to export revolution to Chile's neighbors.[51] The Church committee asked if this estimate's more moderate tone could be squared with the CIA's active program of covert operations in Chile between 1970 and 1973, and whether decisionmakers had adequately considered the intelligence analysts' judgments in formulating American policy.[52]

These queries go to the heart of two key questions. One concerns the attention that top policymakers give—or do not give—to the estimative views of the DCI and the intelligence community. The second, central to this chapter, concerns Helms's quandary in trying to carry out a DCI's responsibility to be at the same time the covert arm of the President's foreign policy and the President's dispassionate chief assessor of world developments. Even though Helms chaired and signed off on the intelligence community's NIEs and SNIEs, it is clear that he believed that his first responsibility was to carry out the President's operational commands. As Helms later explained, the point was:

> that the elected President of the United States, who by the Constitution is the maker of US foreign policy, decided that he wanted something done. . . . If we turned out a hundred SNIEs which said "Allende is a lovely fellow; just leave it to him and things will just bloom in Chile," that would have made no difference if the President wants something else done.

Phillips, [redacted] echoed his former boss's words: "It was one of those situations—it doesn't matter how right [the estimates] are, the President has told us to do this." In Helms's view he had but two choices: "You go with the President or you get out of the government."[53] After leaving office, Helms was subjected to Congressional investigation, public and media scrutiny, and eventually legal proceedings arising from the Agency's actions in Chile during his time as DCI. Ultimately, on 4 November 1977, Judge Barrington D. Parker in the Federal District Court sentenced Helms to two years in jail, to be suspended, and a $2,000 fine after he had pleaded nolo contendere to two misdemeanor counts of failing to testify "fully and completely" before Congress about CIA activity during the Allende era. This judgment stemmed from his appearance before the Senate Foreign

[51]NIE 94-72, 29 June 1972.
[52]Church committee, *Covert Action*, p. 3.
[53]Helms interview, 15 June 1983; Phillips interview, 9 June 1983.

Relations Committee on 7 February 1973, following his nomination as Ambassador to Iran. Asked by Senator Stuart Symington, "Did you try in the Central Intelligence Agency to overthrow the Government in Chile?" Helms had responded with an unequivocal "No, sir." The Senator then asked: "Did you have any money passed to the opponents of Allende?" Again, "No, sir."[54]

Helms would later maintain that he had not wanted to mislead the Senate, but that he had found himself confronted by diametrically opposed obligations: to respond candidly and completely to the committee's questions, and to avoid divulging classified information to unauthorized persons. Central to Helms's perception of the choices before him was his conviction that he was authorized to reveal Agency operations only to the four Congressional committees exercising intelligence oversight. Conscious as he testified before the Foreign Relations Committee that Allende was in a position to exact retribution, Helms feared that candor might cause irreparable damage to important national interests. Faced with this dilemma, he did what many of his colleagues have since testified they would have done: he deliberately narrowed his answers so severely as to render them meaningless and misleading.

In 1974, Congress relieved Helms's successors of the dilemma that he had confronted the year before. Reacting to revelations and allegations about CIA involvement in Chile, Congress adopted the Hughes-Ryan amendment, which required the Agency to report to Congress "in a timely fashion" all covert operations other than those intended solely for obtaining intelligence. The amendment stipulated that each such operation must be preceded by a Presidential Finding that it was "important to the national security" of the United States. By enacting these restrictions the legislators gave voice to a widespread sentiment that covert activity of the kind carried out in Chile between 1970 and 1973 should be far more closely monitored. In this unforeseen manner, Agency actions under Richard Helms made it illegal for future presidents to order DCIs to carry out their directives without first informing Congress. Helms's experience suggests that this was not necessarily a bad thing.

Over the years, Richard Helms would express frustration over the attention accorded the Agency's role in Chile by Congressional investigators, journalists, and historians. "Chile was [not] running the world in 1970," he remarked at one point. Clearly the retrospective focus on the rise and fall of Allende skews our understanding of Helms's actual perspective and priorities at the time. Nor does Helms recall devoting much time to Chilean matters once Allende had been inaugurated.[55] Although the former DCI's recollections of the limited time he devoted to Chile are undoubtedly accurate, his name has been permanently linked to Allende's. To many this seems an unjust reward for Richard Helms's long and distinguished service as Director of Central Intelligence.

[54]US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Hearings: Nomination of Richard Helms to be Ambassador to Iran and CIA International and Domestic Activities*, 93rd Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1974) (hereafter cited as *Hearings: Helms to Iran*), p. 47.
[55]Helms interview, 15 June 1983.

Chapter 5

Defectors and Hostile Penetration

Robert M. Hathaway

Lunching one day with *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee, long after leaving the Agency, Richard Helms suddenly asked the journalist: "Do you know what I worried about most as Director of the CIA?" Bradlee mentioned several of the obvious topics, then fell silent. Helms's response was unexpected. "The CIA is the only intelligence service in the Western world which has never been penetrated by the KGB," Helms finally replied. "That's what I worried about."[1]

Although Bradlee doubtless accepted the contention that CIA was still inviolate, there is a certain ambiguity in Helms's response. Did he worry only about the potential threat, or did he perhaps also worry that the KGB might already have penetrated CIA? Can a DCI ever be certain that his agency has escaped significant hostile penetration? Or must he simply build the best safeguards he can and then trust to his subordinates' skill and perspicacity—and luck?

At bottom, Helms's reply to Bradlee was an act of faith, an unverifiable assumption. For despite a DCI's understandable hunger for reassurances on these matters, the very nature of counterintelligence precludes certainty. All questions remain open, all possibilities thinkable. Individuals cleared of malignant designs at one moment may promptly fall again under suspicion, for counterintelligence demands eternal skepticism. In reality, an intelligence service would not function for long if its members could not establish a common foundation of trust. Even counterintelligence officers must at times lay some of their caution to one side. Yet to suspend doubt about the intentions of one's colleagues violates the first principle of counterintelligence. It represents the deliberate choice of hope over fear.

[1]Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), p. 65.

The impossibility of absolute certainty does not render the counterintelligence function any less vital. If anything, it raises the stakes. "Being penetrated by a hostile service is one of the real disasters," Helms once remarked. "Any Director of Central Intelligence is bound to be deeply concerned about the day that he may walk into the office and have someone tell him that a Soviet penetration has been found in the organization. This is obviously a Director's nightmare."[2]

Defectors frequently furnish the first leads about hostile penetration. But valuable as they are, not all defectors can be equally trusted. Some deliberately fabricate information in an effort to exaggerate their importance. Others mix fact with fantasy until they no longer remember which is which. Most dangerous of all, some are dispatched by the enemy to confuse and deceive. A false defector whose information is believed to be true can disrupt an entire intelligence service. For this reason, determining the bona fides or authenticity of defectors takes precedence over almost all other counterintelligence tasks.

Discovering that one's allies have been penetrated is almost as great a disaster as finding a mole in one's own service. Secrets passed to friends no longer remain confidential, joint operations fall apart, and recriminations replace confidence. Each of these three conundrums—"the inviolability of one's own service, the genuineness of defectors, and the penetration of allied agencies"—leads back to the other two. All three throw doubt on the CIA's fundamental integrity and capacity to carry out its missions. Richard Helms confronted all three as DCI, and two of them—"the questions of CIA's possible penetration and of defectors' bona fides"—threatened his Agency with open schism. Ultimately, none of the three lend themselves to tidy once-and-for-all solution.

The primary responsibility for protecting the Director from these dangers lay with the Counterintelligence (CI) Staff. Nominally a staff element within the Deputy Directorate of Plans (DDP),[3] the CI Staff had been led since 1954 by James Angleton, who had first practiced his craft as a young OSS officer in World War II. By the mid-1960s, Angleton's staff had evolved into an autonomous fiefdom, operating outside regular channels and enjoying direct access to a succession of DCIs. When Helms moved into the Director's office in 1966, Angleton was already a legend within the Agency—a brilliant, dedicated professional with counterintelligence experience unmatched in the Western world. Like Helms, Angleton had made the transition from OSS to CIA after the war, and by the 1960s he was accorded a mixture of deference and awe. In Angleton's case this

[2]Richard Helms, interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 30 May 1984 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 30 May 1984).

[3]Around 1965, the "Deputy" was dropped from the names of the Directorates of Support (now Administration), Intelligence, and Science and Technology. The Directorate of Plans, which continued to use the alternate term Clandestine Services (CS), was renamed the Directorate of Operations (DO) in 1973.

attitude was reinforced by his consciously enveloping himself and his staff in an aura of mystery, hinting at knowledge of grave secrets and hidden intrigue too sensitive to share.

In 1956 it was Angleton who managed to obtain—[redacted]—a copy of Nikita Khrushchev's secret denunciation of Stalin before the Soviet Union's Twentieth Party Congress. This coup, on top of a distinguished wartime record, established Angleton's reputation for all time and ensured him a place of prominence in the Agency. His relatively modest position in the chain of command in no way reflected his actual influence. Several times a week, for example, he would drive Allen Dulles home from work, a task that afforded him incomparable access to the DCI. In one notable instance, Angleton and Dulles debated the relative merits of Helms and Richard Bissell to succeed Frank Wisner as Deputy Director for Plans (DDP). Angleton thus found himself in the extraordinary position of advising on the selection of his new boss.[4]

Utterly convinced of the seriousness of the threat facing the West, Angleton by the mid-1960s had come to hold a set of views that, if accurate, portended grave consequences for the United States. Angleton believed that the Soviet Union, guided by as skillful a group of leaders as ever served one government, was implacable in its hostility toward the West. International Communism remained monolithic, and reports of a rift between Moscow and Peking were only part of an elaborate "disinformation campaign." An "integrated and purposeful Socialist Bloc," Angleton wrote in 1966, sought to foster false stories of "splits, evolution, power struggles, economic disasters, [and] good and bad Communism" to present "a wilderness of mirrors" to the confused West. Once this program of strategic deception had succeeded in splintering Western solidarity, Moscow would find it an easy matter to pick off the Free World nations one by one. Only the Western intelligence services, in Angleton's view, could counter this challenge and stave off disaster. And because the Soviets had penetrated every one of these services, the fate of Western civilization rested, to a large extent, in the hands of the counterintelligence experts. Their "only priority," Angleton told members of the CI Staff shortly before Helms became DCI, was "penetration and disinformation. . . . [T]here is no other priority."[5] Opinion within the CIA on Angleton and his views was sharply divided. Many of the officers most experienced in Bloc affairs endorsed the principal tenets of his outlook.[6] Nowhere was this truer

[4]James Angleton, interview by Robert M Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 27 July 1984 (hereafter cited as Angleton interview, 27 July 1984). Angleton lost this particular argument, for he thought Helms the better choice. DCI John McCone appointed Helms DDP in February 1962, when Bissell left the Agency after the Bay of Pigs disaster.

[5]James Angleton, C/CI, letter to Marcel Chalet, 7 June 1966; James Angleton, briefing to CI Staff, c. March 1966.

[6]"Bloc" in this chapter refers to the Soviet Union and the eastern European countries under its suzerainty, a usage common throughout CIA in the Helms period. It does not refer to an alleged Sino-Soviet Bloc, the existence of which most Agency experts had discounted by the mid-1960s. Nor does it imply that Russia and its eastern European neighbors invariably acted as a monolithic entity in international affairs.

than in the DDP's Soviet Russia Division (SR), headed in 1966 by David E. Murphy. Others, however, ridiculed Angleton's habitual tendency to see all Soviet actions as purposeful, rather than to admit a role for chance, coincidence, or other contingent explanations. In 1971 a former Angleton disciple described how in Angleton's scheme of things "the circle of conspiracy grew ever wider until a point of real absurdity was reached."[7] By the mid-1960s, more than one officer familiar with Angleton's work had concluded that his obsession with Soviet machinations had so skewed his perspective as to undermine the effectiveness of the entire CI Staff. A study completed for the Directorate of Operations (DO) in 1976 termed him "a man of loose and disjointed thinking whose theories, when applied to matters of public record, were patently unworthy of serious consideration."[8] Even his detractors, however, conceded that the CI chief was, after his own fashion, a genius.

Although Helms knew that Angleton provoked hostility in some quarters, he also admired the man's abilities, intelligence, and tenacity. Angleton's experience, he believed, made him the officer best able to fathom the arcane world of double agents, disinformation, and false defectors, where appearances were often little more than a disguise for duplicity. As DCI Helms sometimes mystified and exasperated other senior officers by his staunch support for Angleton, Howard Osborn, Director of Security, recalls "how Helms never turned [Angleton] down on anything." Even if everyone in a meeting opposed Angleton's view, Helms always decided in favor of his CI chief. "It never failed," Osborn insists, "no matter how senior [Angleton's] opponent."[9] Osborn exaggerates the case, but this perception naturally served to increase Angleton's stature and power in the Agency. David Murphy has explained how he tended to defer to Angleton, on the assumption that with such firm backing from the DCI, Angleton must know something that others did not.[10] Long after he retired, Helms conceded that he eventually came to believe that Angleton had gone "a little bit overboard" in some of his convictions.[11] As DCI, however, Helms's steady support made Angleton a key Agency figure, who was well positioned to play a leading role in some of the most controversial episodes of the Helms years.

Yuriy Ivanovich Nosenko

Of all the problems that Richard Helms confronted during his nearly seven years as DCI, few gave him greater trouble than the Nosenko case.

[7] [redacted] Memorandum for the Record, 28 January 1971.
[8] John Hart, "The Monster Plot: Counterintelligence in the Case of Yuriy Ivanovich Nosenko," December 1976 (hereafter cited as Hart, "Monster Plot"). DCI William Colby forced Angleton to retire in December 1974.
[9] Cleveland Cram, memorandum, "Discussion with Mr. Howard Osborne" [sic], 16 November 1978.
[10] *Ibid.*; [redacted] Memorandum for the Record, 20 December 1978.
[11] Helms interview, 30 May 1984.

Indeed, he later confided, "I don't think there has ever been anything more frustrating in my life."[12]

The beginning of the affair goes back several years before Helms's appointment as DCI. On 5 June 1962, Soviet KGB officer Yuriy Ivanovich Nosenko contacted American Embassy officers in Geneva with an offer to sell intelligence information. Over the next nine days Soviet Russia Division's Tennent (Pete) Bagley secretly met with Nosenko on five occasions. During these furtive rendezvous, Nosenko revealed the identity of an American [redacted] whom Soviet intelligence had recruited, the location of 52 KGB microphones in the US Embassy in Moscow, and other useful leads. On 15 June, Nosenko returned to Moscow, after agreeing to reestablish contact with CIA when next in the West. Bagley, exultant over his new source, sped back to Headquarters to report.[13]

The defection six months earlier of another KGB officer, Anatoliy Golitsyn, heavily influenced the CIA's reaction to Bagley's new find. Agency officers, accustomed to working with wispy leads and a paucity of hard data, marveled at their apparent good fortune in obtaining two so potentially valuable sources almost simultaneously. The more experienced officers, however, were immediately skeptical that good fortune had anything to do with this timing. Golitsyn had warned that Moscow would dispatch provocateurs and false leads to discredit his information and to protect Soviet penetrations within the American Government. After receiving a briefing on Bagley's new source, Golitsyn confidently pronounced Nosenko a disinformation agent sent to sidetrack CIA's hunt for moles.[14]

For reasons most intelligence professionals still do not understand, Angleton accepted at face value virtually every judgment Golitsyn rendered over more than a decade. As a consequence, Bagley's enthusiasm evoked only cold skepticism from the counterintelligence chief, who used his great prestige to persuade Bagley that Nosenko represented not an opportunity, but a threat. Nineteen months later, when Nosenko reappeared in Geneva and announced his desire to defect, Agency officers working on the case arbitrarily dismissed the possibility of his being bona fide. In early February 1964, CIA, giving Nosenko no inkling of its suspicions, whisked him out of Geneva and back to the United States. Two months of questioning failed to dispel these doubts, and in April DDP officers confined him to a safehouse in Maryland and informed him that CIA had known all along of his KGB mission. Despite Nosenko's repeated assertions that he was a genuine defector, DDP began hostile interrogation two days later. In the months and years that followed, the Counterintelligence Staff and Soviet

[12]US Congress, House, Select Committee on Assassinations, *Hearings: Investigation of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*, 12 vols., 95th Cong., 2d sess., (Washington, DC: GO, 1979) (hereafter cited as House, *Hearings, Assassination of JFK*) , IV, p. 101.
[13]Hart, "Monster Plot."
[14]*Ibid.*

Russia Division dismissed the voluminous information his questioning produced as a smokescreen designed to obscure cases of real value. Some of what Nosenko offered was, indeed, transparently false. Yet when Nosenko produced information whose accuracy they could not dispute, his handlers claimed it was "giveaway" material that the Soviets presumed CIA already had.[15]

The case assumed a special urgency when Nosenko reported that he had personally reviewed the KGB files on Lee Harvey Oswald, President Kennedy's assassin. Nosenko claimed that the KGB, after Oswald's defection in 1959 to the Soviet Union, had identified the American as unstable and declined to have anything to do with him. This remained true, according to Nosenko, even after the former marine revealed he had been a radar operator, a specialty believed to be of great interest to the Soviets. As Helms would observe before a Congressional committee many years later, "This strained credulity at the time. It strains it to this day."[16] If Nosenko's assurances concerning Oswald were true, then the persistent reports of Soviet involvement in the assassination could be dismissed. On the other hand, if the KGB had sent Nosenko to mislead CIA, suspicions about a direct Soviet connection with Kennedy's death would be reinforced, with consequences, Helms would later say, that could be "staggering." "Overriding everything," Angleton explained, was the question of whether the KGB was involved in the assassination. Establishing Nosenko's bona fides, Helms observed in 1978, "became a matter of the utmost importance" to the United States "and, indeed, to the world."[17]

The Nosenko case had attracted the attention of Richard Helms from its very beginning. When Nosenko first approached CIA in 1962, Helms was Deputy Director for Plans, the Agency officer formally responsible for the conduct of Soviet intelligence and counterintelligence operations. He had participated as well in the discussions in 1964 leading to Nosenko's confinement. Later that year, Helms had gone privately to Chief Justice Earl Warren, to warn him that his commission investigating President Kennedy's assassination should not automatically accept Nosenko's assurances about Oswald, since CIA could not vouch for Nosenko's authenticity.[18]

Nosenko proved a tough case to crack. After over seven months of hostile examination had failed to elicit a confession, Helms concluded that the likely payoff of further interrogation would not compensate for the continuing drain on Agency resources. In November 1964 he ordered a rapid windup of the case. This was the first—"but not the last"—of several such directives whose implementation would long be delayed.[19] Some weeks

[15]*Ibid.*
[16]House, *Hearings, Assassination of JFK*, IV, p. 12.
[17]Angleton interview, 27 July 1984; House, *Hearings, Assassination of JFK*, IV, p. 21.
[18]Hart, "The Monster Plot."
[19]Tennent Bagley, Memorandum for the Record, 20 November 1964.

later, faced with continuing uncertainty about Nosenko's status and determined subordinates in Soviet Russia Division who held out hope for a breakthrough, Helms reluctantly revoked his order.

In mid-1965, Soviet Russia Division informed Helms, now Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, that Nosenko had been transferred to an isolated stockade [redacted] There, according to a later DO[20] investigation, he was allowed "fewer amenities than he would have received in most jails or prisons within the United States."[21] [redacted] Helms had, therefore, had a long-standing association with the case well before he became DCI at the end of June 1966.[22]

[redacted] by 23 August his uneasiness over the whole affair led him to instruct Murphy and DDP Desmond FitzGerald to close the case within 60 days. In issuing this directive, Murphy later explained, Helms emphasized that knowledge of the case could not be contained forever, and that he was unwilling to accept the inevitable attacks from Congress and the press once it became known that "we had held [Nosenko] in these circumstances and in what would be interpreted as outright defiance of law and custom." The most suitable resolution of the case, Helms thought, would be to return Nosenko to the Soviet Union, where at least he would have little access to the Western media.[23] [redacted]

At Murphy's request, Helms extended his 60-day deadline until the end of 1966, but the stubborn Nosenko still refused to confess. Finally in February 1967, SB Division (the new name for SR) submitted a "final report" on the case, written primarily by Bagley. A lengthy compendium purporting to analyze all aspects of the affair, it unequivocally concluded that Nosenko was a KGB agent, dispatched to divert CIA from investigations that might spot hostile penetrations by overwhelming it with false

[20]In March 1973, the Directorate of Plans was renamed the Directorate of Operations (DO).
[21]Hart, "The Monster Plot."
[redacted]
[23]David Murphy, C/SR, Memorandum for the Record, 25 August 1966.
[24]David Murphy, C/SR, Memorandum for the Record, 1 September 1966; Helms interview, 30 May 1984.

leads.[25] Much to Helms's dismay, Bagley's "final report" proved anything but final. A few weeks after the study's completion, Leonard McCoy, a Soviet Bloc Division officer who had long harbored doubts about the prevailing views on Nosenko, went out of channels and submitted to Helms a 31-page memorandum documenting his concerns about the case. After making a pitch for Nosenko's authenticity, McCoy went on to say that the question involved far more than justice for a single individual. The handling of Nosenko, he wrote, "contaminates our CI analysis now, in past cases, and for a long time in the future. Rather than being disinformed by the enemy, we are deluding ourselves." Moreover, should word of Nosenko's treatment filter back to the Soviet Union, other potential defectors would be discouraged from coming over.[26]

McCoy's memorandum demonstrated the high stakes involved in assessing Nosenko's true status, quite aside from the Oswald connection. Particularly telling was his warning that the matter went far beyond the fate of one individual. As long as CIA assumed that Nosenko was a KGB provocateur, no Agency asset operating behind the Iron Curtain was immune from suspicion if his reporting confirmed anything Nosenko said. No defector could be accorded legitimacy unless he denounced Nosenko. Moreover, Nosenko's assurances that the KGB had failed to infiltrate CIA could be regarded only as disinformation designed to mask serious penetrations. The resultant suspicion might well destroy the effectiveness of Agency operations against the Soviet Bloc and sow undeserved doubts about the allegiance of loyal Agency officers.

Nor was this merely a hypothetical danger. In an earlier memorandum for the Director, written near the end of 1966, McCoy had complained of a "negative environment" within the Soviet Bloc Division that was generating:

> a widespread feeling of frustration, futility, and impotence. . . . Old standards of information and source evaluation have been abandoned and even reversed . . . with bad analysis driving good analysis out of existence. The validity of Soviet area experience is being denied. The effect is paralysis of our Soviet effort.[27]

A separate investigation carried out by the Inspector General, Gordon Stewart, in 1968 echoed McCoy's charges. The attitude prevalent in the Soviet Bloc Division, the Inspector General reported, "is now negative, defensive, indeed defeatist. It seems that almost every operational opportunity is viewed with such suspicion that defense against the suspected penetration, provocation or KGB operation becomes our primary objective."[28]

[25]This study was often referred to as Bagley's "thousand pager," although it fell short of this mark by about 100 pages.
[26]Leonard McCoy, Memorandum for Chief, SR Division, "Some Observations on the Nosenko Case," 10 December 1965, copy given to Helms's secretary in April 1967.
[27]Leonard McCoy, Memorandum for the Director, 5 December 1966.
[28]Gordon Stewart, Inspector General, Memorandum for the Record, "Interim Report—Survey of SB Division," 9 May 1968.

The reception accorded two FBI sources codenamed SCOTCH and BOURBON appeared to bear out these dark assessments. SCOTCH, an officer in the KGB, and BOURBON, a GRU colonel, both offered information supporting Nosenko's story, while denying knowledge of significant penetration of the CIA. By giving credence to Nosenko's claims, each fell under suspicion; Bagley's 1967 "thousand pager" concluded that both were dispatched agents whose goals paralleled Nosenko's. Only in later years did the Agency concede that both were probably bona fide. In the meantime, valuable leads were ignored while Angleton's Counterintelligence Staff spun increasingly complex theories to explain Soviet machinations. "By 1965," a subsequent Agency investigation disclosed, "the CI Staff and the SR Division, heavily influenced by their experiences with Golitsyn and Nosenko, had created a counterintelligence environment in which it was difficult, if not impossible, for any Soviet intelligence source, walk-in, or defector to be accepted as genuine."[29]

Helms was well aware of these problems. Even before McCoy's warning reached his desk, he had determined to bring a fresh perspective into the Nosenko case. Early in March 1967 he directed his DDCI, VAdm. Rufus Taylor, to undertake a thorough investigation of the affair. Taylor later recalled that Helms had told him that this was a matter that worried him deeply, and that he feared that the DDP officers handling Nosenko had lost their objectivity. The DDCI added that Helms felt:

> it was wrong to keep [Nosenko] confined and we had to do something with him one way or the other. . . . [H]e was really distressed about the fact that this fellow had been in confinement so long and that they had never been able to arrive at a conclusion as to whether he was a bona fide . . . and he just had to get it resolved.[30]

Significantly, Angleton opposed bringing Taylor into the case. It was a serious mistake, he later remarked. "What had been highly compartmentalized had become another group going into the entire matter. . . . It was a great error of judgment." Recalling these events, Angleton conceded that Helms had faced immense pressures. "I can understand the frustrations of a front office in terms of not resolving things. But . . . it's a failure to recognize . . . that you don't see the resolving of cases in your own lifetime. You've got to live with these sort of allegations."[31] After three years of indecision, however, the DCI was no longer prepared to wait a lifetime—his or Nosenko's. The CI chief's advice would be rejected.

[29] [redacted]

[30] VAdm. Rufus Taylor, interview by John Hart, 1976 (hereafter cited as Taylor interview, 1976).

[31] Angleton interview, 27 July 1984.

Helms's directive to Taylor in 1967 finally broke the logjam, although the case dragged on for another two years. In May, Howard Osborn, Director of Security, informed the DDCI that his office had never been convinced that Nosenko was a Soviet plant and had substantial reservations about the professionalism of the methods Soviet Bloc Division had used in interrogating Nosenko. Specifically, the two polygraph examinations given the Russian had been designed not to establish his true intentions, but only to "break him." (At one point the polygraph had been rigged with bells and lights, which could be manipulated by SB personnel hidden in another room, and whose sole purpose was to rattle Nosenko.) Osborn recommended that Bruce Solie, a senior staff member of the Office of Security, be placed in charge of further interrogation.[32]

Unimpressed by Bagley's lengthy review, Admiral Taylor reported to Helms that neither Bagley nor anyone else had been able to explain how the Soviets might have hoped to benefit by sending Nosenko as a provocateur. The Russian, he concluded, posed no threat to CIA and ought to be rehabilitated. The DDCI also brought the disturbing news that the friction that the case had created in the Soviet Bloc Division had spread from Headquarters to the [redacted] detention facility. The DCI then directed Taylor to proceed as he thought best, and the Office of Security moved Nosenko from [redacted] to more comfortable quarters near Washington in late October 1967. Three days later, Bruce Solie began a new investigation of Nosenko's bona fides. At the same time, the Office of Security continued to send the Soviet Bloc Division daily reports, ostensibly from [redacted] as if Nosenko were still detained there. Murphy and his division were thus entirely cut out of any further involvement in the affair.[33]

Proceeding deliberately, Solie did not report his findings until 1 October 1968. His conclusions were unequivocal: Nosenko was, in fact, what he claimed to be and should be accepted as a legitimate defector. Solie's timing was propitious, for less than two weeks earlier the FBI had come to a similar judgment. Reporting to Helms on 4 October 1968, Admiral Taylor endorsed Solie's findings and recommended "resettlement and rehabilitation of Nosenko with sufficient dispatch to permit his full freedom by 1 January 1969."[34]

Seventeen days later Helms called most of the senior officers involved in the case to his office to consider Nosenko's fate. He first asked each of those present to comment on Nosenko's true intentions and future handling. Taylor, Karamessines, Osborn, Inspector General Gordon Stewart, Solie, and [redacted] the new Soviet Bloc Division chief, all

[32]Howard Osborn, Director of Security, Memorandum for the Record, 29 May 1967; Howard Osborn, interview by John Hart, 1976 (hereafter cited as Osborn interview, 1976).
[33]Hart, "Monster Plot."
[34]House, *Hearings, Assassination of JFK*, IV, p. 46.

recommended that Nosenko be released from strict CIA custody. Although there were differences about whether his authenticity had been conclusively proved or remained in dispute, almost everyone present agreed that Nosenko had important services to offer CIA and should be retained under an Agency contract. The only dissenters from this general line were the three Counterintelligence Staff officers present, who steadfastly argued that Nosenko had been dispatched by the KGB and should undergo further interrogation before the Agency decided his future.[35]

Revealing his frustration at the lack of consensus on Nosenko's status, Helms "rather tartly" (according to one contemporaneous document) reminded his subordinates that the eve of a presidential election was a poor time to ask for a decision. He, therefore, ruled that no final judgments would be made before 1 February of the following year, 1969. He was especially impatient with the Counterintelligence Staff for failing to document its reservations more convincingly. The meeting's minutes report that Helms "severely tasked" the CI Staff in a "staccato, humorless sequence." Although offering no judgment of his own on Nosenko's motives, the DCI decided that the Agency would share Solie's paper with the FBI.[36]

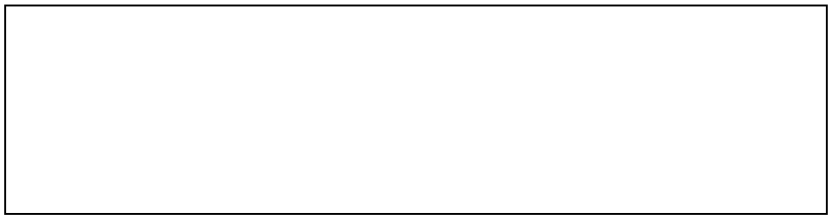
On 31 January 1969, the DCI once more summoned his subordinates to discuss the case. After again asking each officer for his opinion, Helms handed down the new Agency position concerning Nosenko. Noting that substantial doubts about Nosenko's bona fides remained, Helms stressed the need to maintain the momentum of the investigation. He instructed the Office of Security to continue to elicit information from Nosenko, and to be careful to deny him any opportunity to make contact with the KGB. He also ruled, however, that CIA should progressively relax its restraints on Nosenko's freedom, and that Security should proceed with his rehabilitation. Finally, he decided that Nosenko should be given a CIA contract.[37]

Many years later, Helms recalled the dilemma he had faced. "Here we had held this man for this long period, if you want to put it this way, in *durance vile*. We had interrogated him. We had done everything we knew how to do about him. And it was getting to a place where it was likely to turn into some sort of scandal if we didn't regularize his situation." But what to do? "When I was faced with the decision, I never felt that I was given adequate evidence that the man was either clean or not clean . . . it was still muddy on the day that I finally said he must be resettled." So Helms refrained from making final judgment on Nosenko's authenticity. The Agency was forced to "take [its] chances as to what he represented, whether he really was still working for the Soviets or he wasn't still working

[redacted] Memorandum for C/CI, 14 January 1969.
[redacted] Memorandum for Chief, CI, 3 December 1968; [redacted] Memorandum for C/CI, 14 January 1969.
[37] Memorandum of Understanding, signed by Howard Osborn and Thomas Karamessines, c. 3 February 1969.

for the Soviets." Helms was placed in an unenviable position. "I didn't like having to do it, I didn't like the messiness that was involved in our not being able to decide distinctly that he was one thing or the other," he remembered. But the time for indecision had passed. "I simply had on my hands a situation which had become intolerable. . . . This case simply had to be cleaned up regardless of what his *bona fides* were, so I moved to clean it up."[38]

In the spring of 1969, Nosenko moved into a private residence and obtained his own automobile. CIA provided him with a new identity, and he subsequently married an American woman, filed for citizenship, and worked productively as an Agency consultant. By 1978, Leonard McCoy, now acting chief of the Counterintelligence Staff, was able to report that Nosenko was "probably the most valuable source of counterintelligence information that the US Government has ever had."



For Helms, a few additional matters required attention before the case could be wound up. The first concerned Congress. In July 1969, after getting the DCI's approval of his "talking points," Legislative Counsel John Maury briefed the senior staff members of CIA's four Congressional subcommittees about the affair. Some doubts remained unresolved concerning Nosenko's legitimacy, Maury explained. He briefly alluded to Nosenko's long ordeal as "accommodat[ion] . . . under highly secure conditions," with the implication that these measures were undertaken largely to protect Nosenko from KGB assassins. Maury reported to Helms that none of the staffers registered particular curiosity about the case and that he doubted that all of them would necessarily inform their chairmen. In his opinion CIA need take no further action.[40]

A second matter demanding action was staffing. Reporting to Helms on the case in the autumn of 1967, Taylor had warned that the situation in the Soviet Bloc Division was very unhealthy, that fears about Soviet penetration had disrupted the Division's effectiveness, and that major personnel changes were required. In 1968 the Inspector General's Staff, almost

[38]Helms interview, 30 May 1984.
[39]"The Bona Fides of Yuriy Ivanovich Nosenko," Attachment to: Leonard McCoy, AC/CI, Memorandum for the DCI, 24 February 1978.
[40]John Maury, Legislative Counsel, draft memorandum, 19 June 1969; John Maury Memorandum for the Record, 5 August 1969.

certainly at Helms's instigation, conducted its own study of the Soviet Bloc Division. Its findings mirrored Taylor's alarming conclusions and attributed the Division's poor performance in recent years to a preoccupation with Nosenko. Many current Soviet Bloc Division officers, the survey team judged, "have gotten into a rut, and a deep one at that." It recommended reassignments to bring in operations officers "who have not been exposed to myths that tend to stultify," a reference to the prevalent belief within the Division in the KGB's omnipotence.[41]

Helms had not needed the Inspector General's study to recognize the Soviet Bloc Division's staffing deficiencies. In the spring of 1967, Tennent Bagley had been moved to a position outside the Division, having served as the Division's deputy chief for less than 12 months. Early the following year David Murphy was relieved as Division chief and shipped to a new post overseas. A number of retired officers from that period are convinced that both men were forced out of the Division because of senior management's unhappiness with their handling of the Nosenko case. Certainly [redacted] Murphy's successor, had the appearance of a handpicked Helms lieutenant, for he and the DCI traced their friendship back to OSS days, when for a brief period they had shared living quarters.[42]

Bagley and Murphy vigorously dispute the idea that either left the Division under any sort of a cloud. Both claim that they were due for rotation and had requested their new positions, and point out that the assignments were attractive and logical ones for persons of their experience.[43] Helms himself no longer remembers the circumstances of the transfers. In any event, their reassignment gratified those who urged a thorough housecleaning in the Soviet Bloc Division, while those trying to resolve the Nosenko case doubtless also found Bagley's and Murphy's departure convenient.

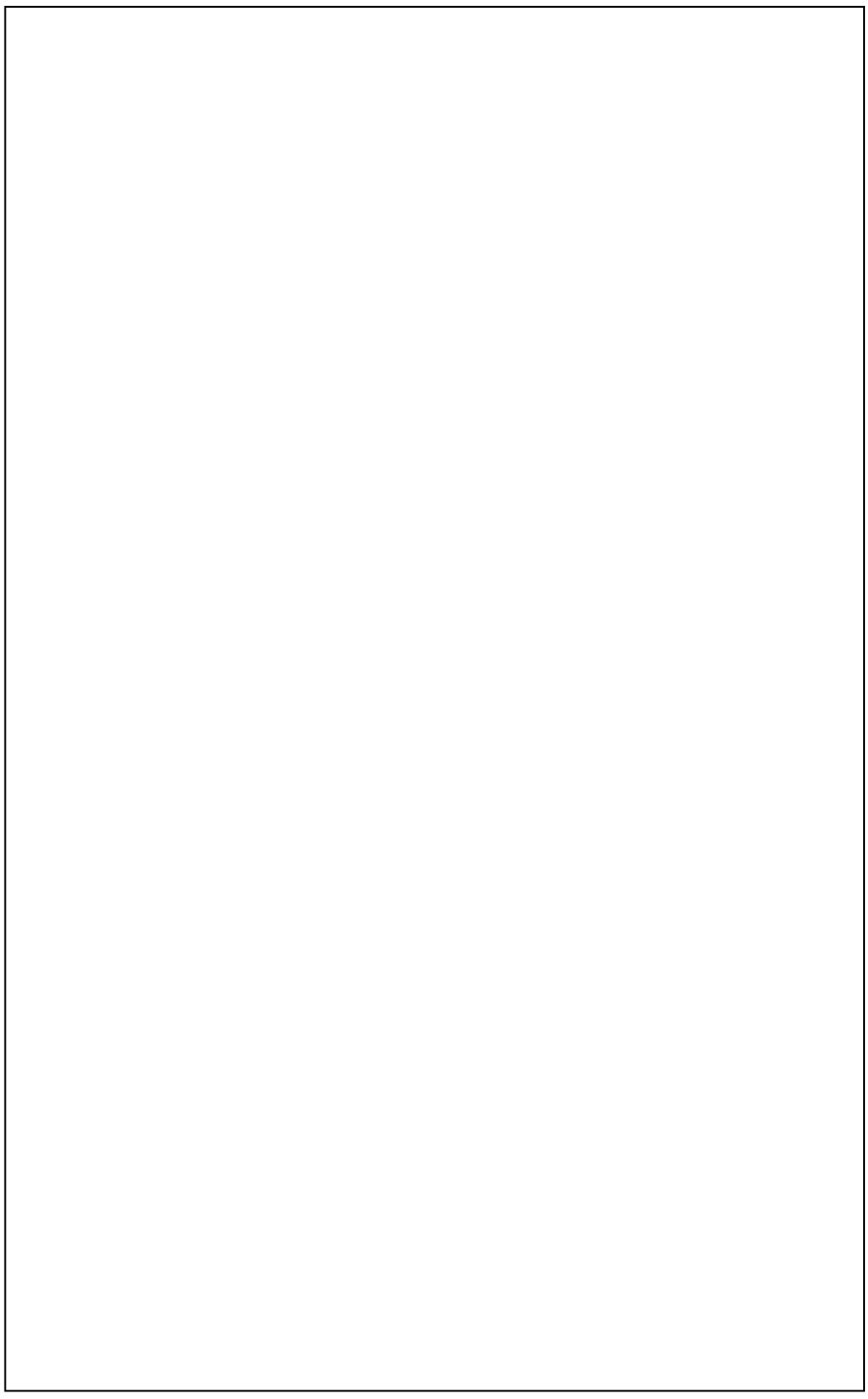
Finally, a grateful Helms turned to the individual whose painstaking work had extracted the Agency from a potentially explosive situation. In 1970 the DCI awarded Bruce Solie the Intelligence Medal of Merit. The Nosenko case had been "a succubus hanging over our heads," Angleton recalls Helms saying, and the award to Solie probably reflected the DCI's gratitude and relief at having finally gotten free of the threat that it had posed for so long.[44]

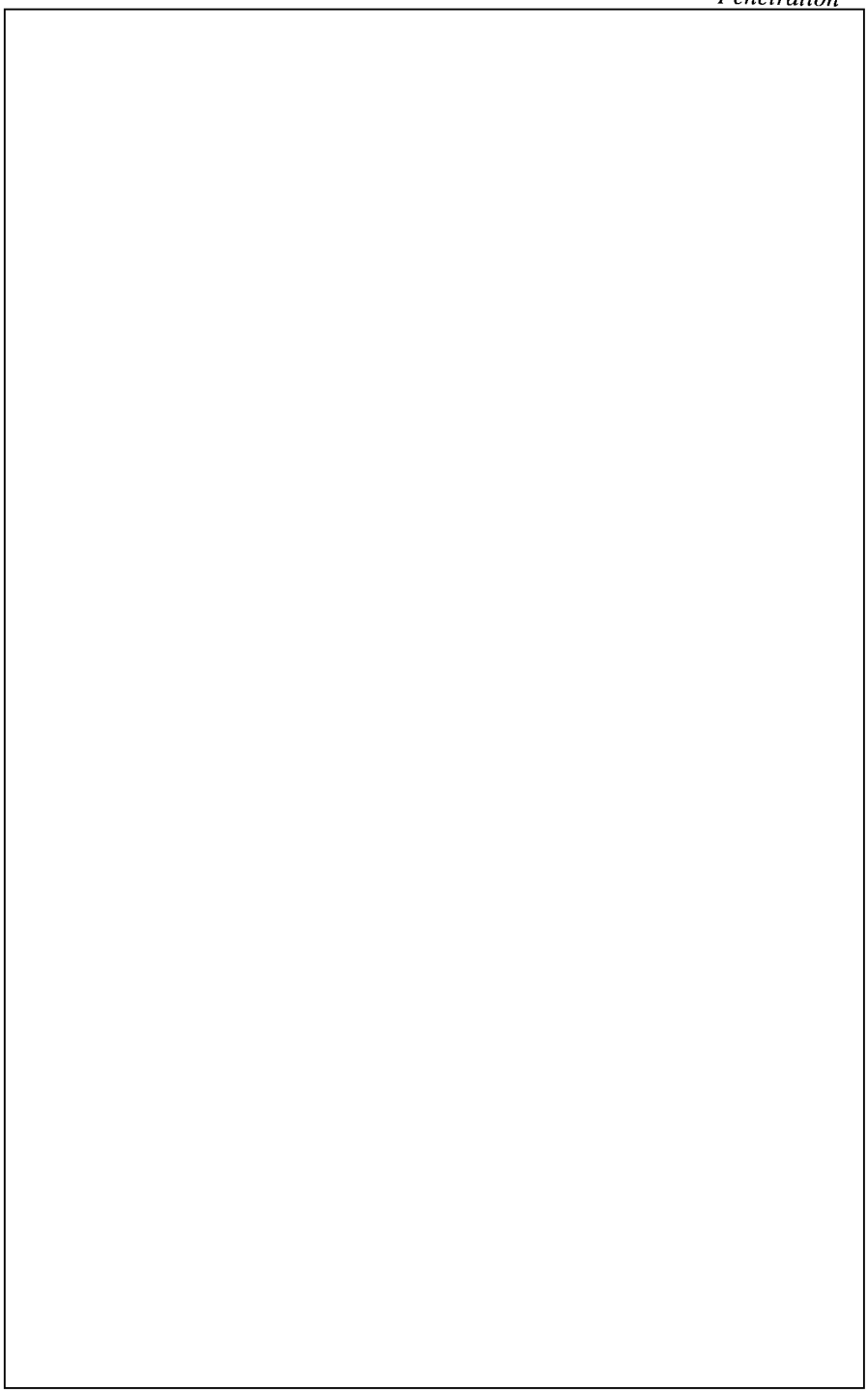
[41] *Ibid.*; Memorandum for the Record, "Interim Report—Survey of SB Division," 9 May 1968.

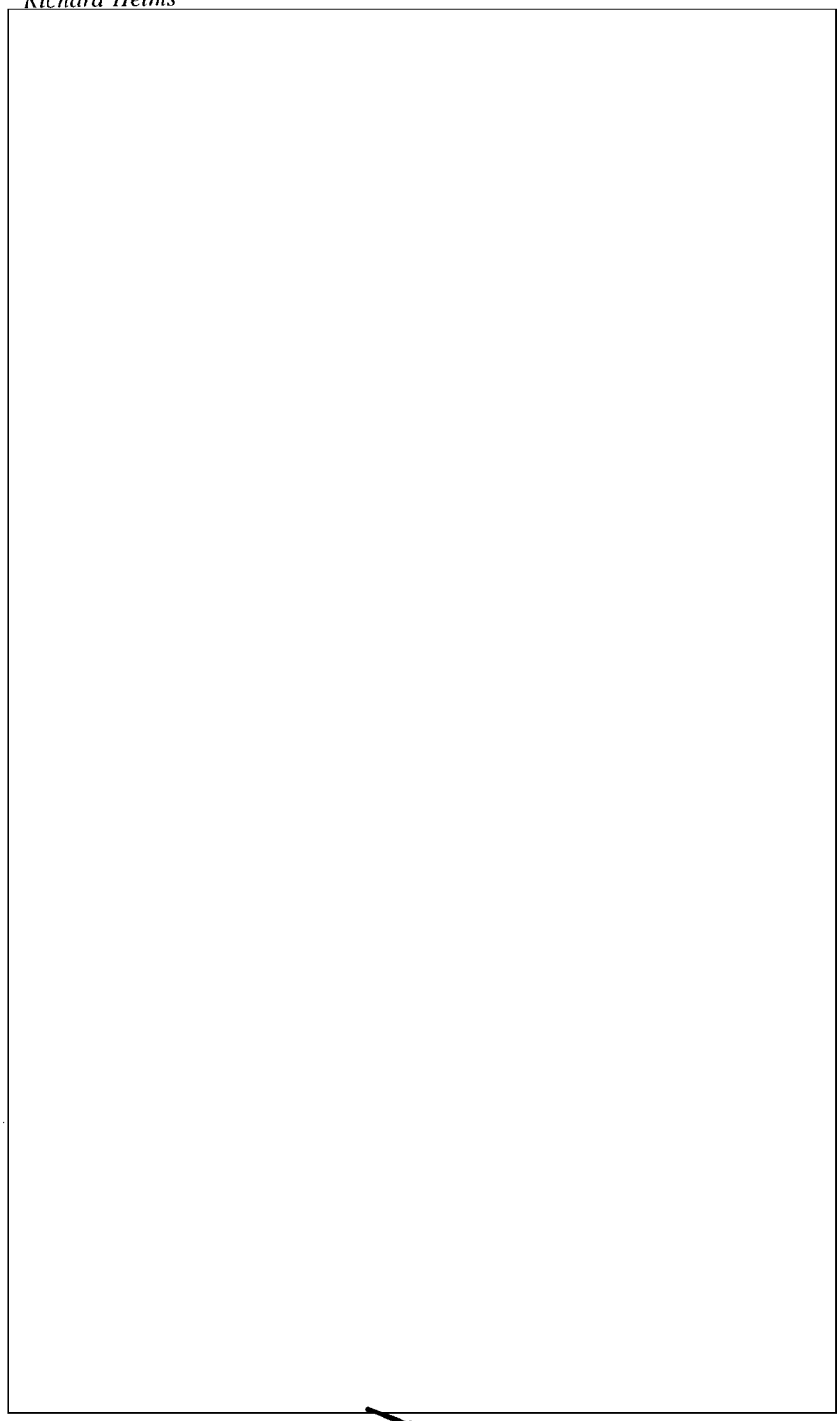
[42] [redacted] interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 14 June 1984 (hereafter cited as Kingsley interview).

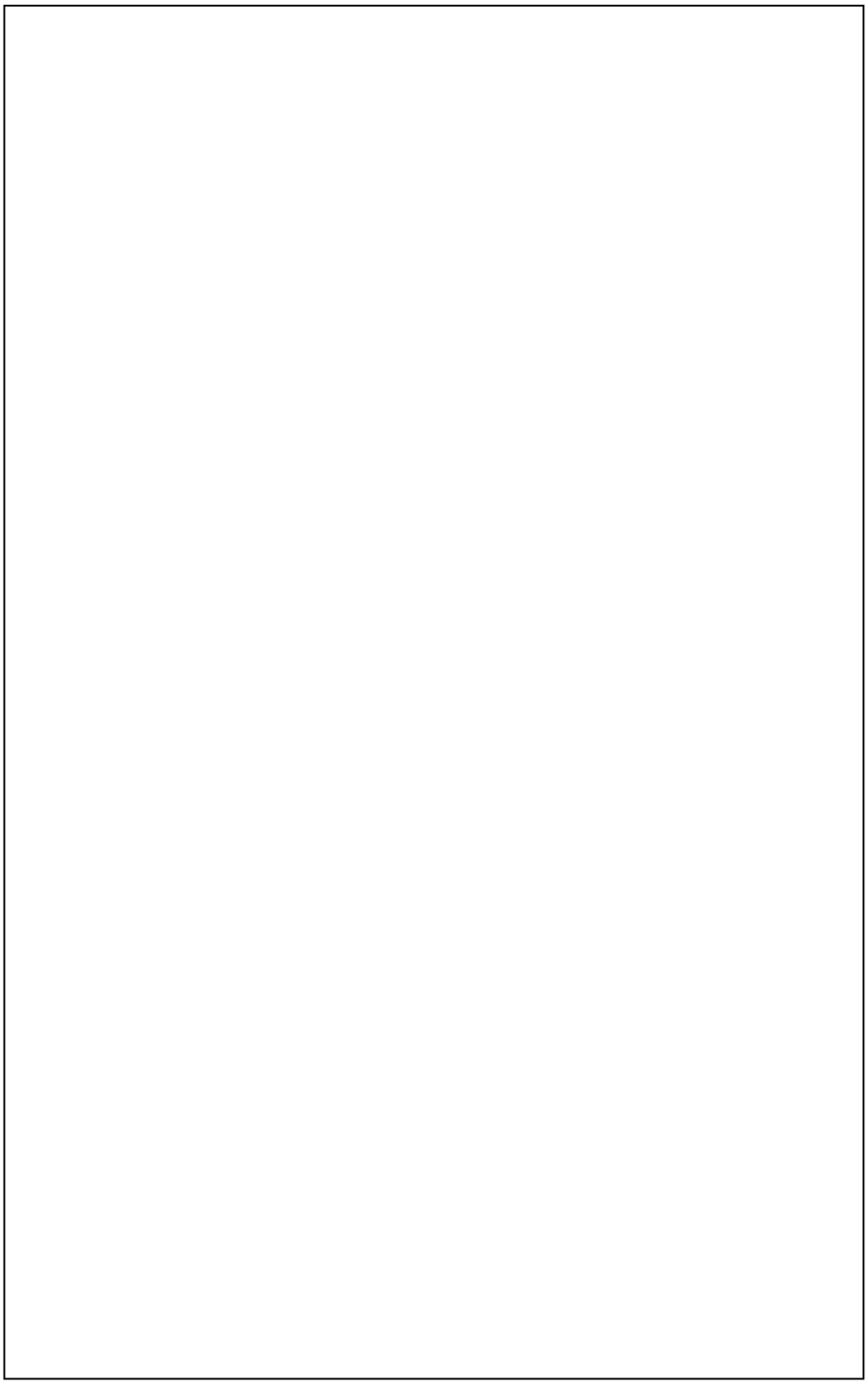
[43] David Murphy, interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 31 May 1984 (hereafter cited as Murphy interview); House, *Hearings, Assassination of JFK*, XII, p. 580.

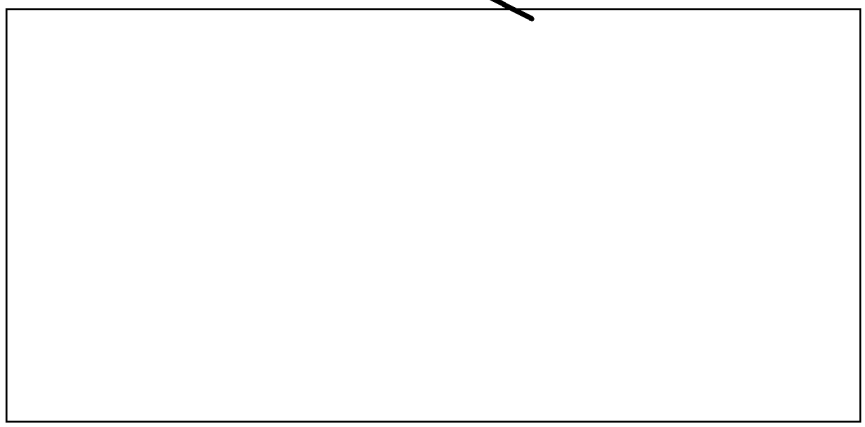
[44] Angleton interview, 27 July 1984.









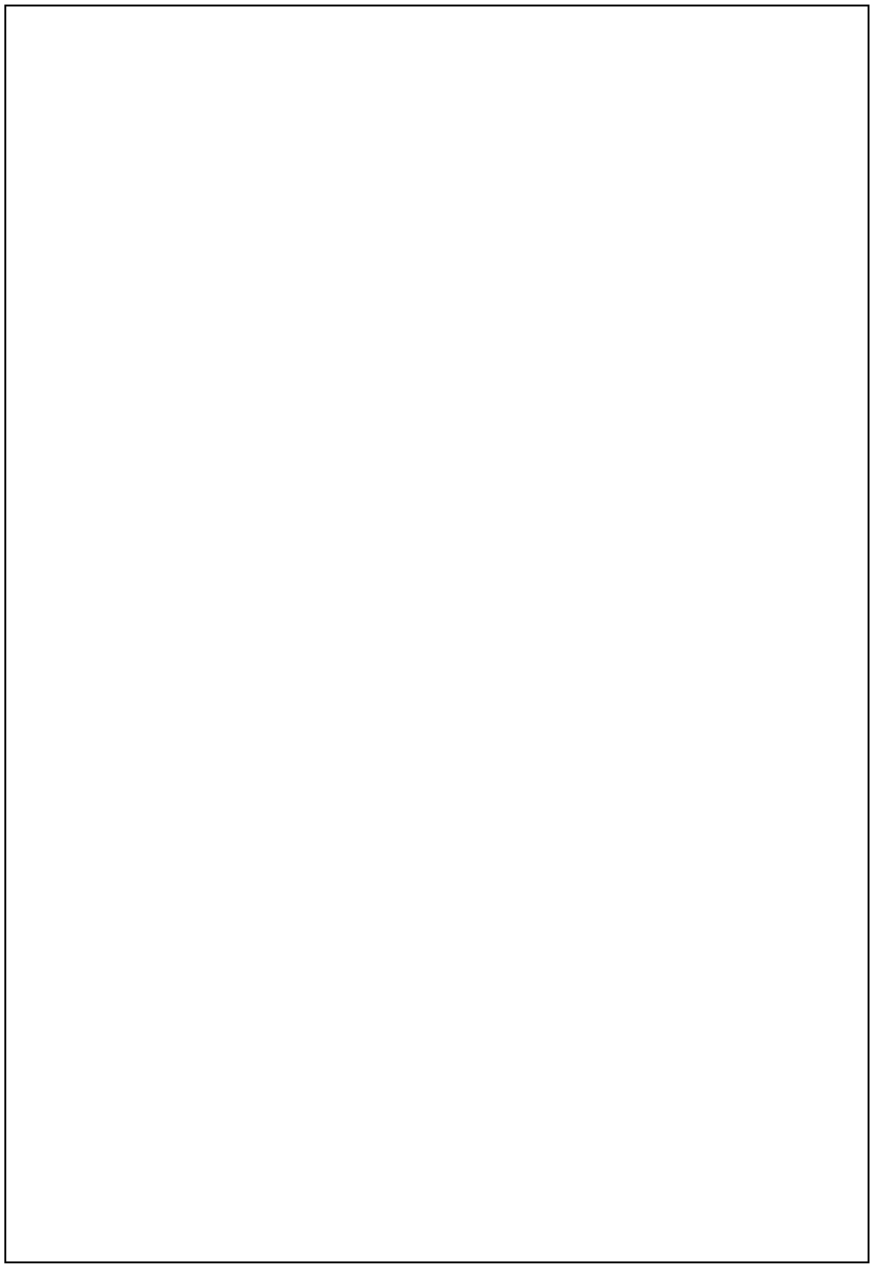


Svetlana Alliluyeva

A middle-aged Soviet woman had walked into the American Embassy and asked for asylum. Her married name, Svetlana Alliluyeva, then meant little, but her maiden name immediately grabbed the attention of Washington officialdom. The would-be defector was the daughter of Joseph Stalin.

Here was a real coup for the West—if her defection were genuine. But there were dangers as well. Suppose she were a Soviet provocation, part of some diabolical scheme to embarrass the United States? What if she were mentally unstable? Moscow propagandists would have a field day playing on the theme of the heartless Americans taking advantage of a sick, defenseless woman. Or suppose she later changed her mind about defecting and charged entrapment? Each of these possibilities suggested the need for prudence and for a careful interview before the United States accepted her story at face value.

Yet other considerations dictated haste. The Soviets would eventually trace Alliluyeva to the American Embassy, and a leisurely investigation into her mental state would be impossible amidst angry Russian demands for her return. India (like the United States) does not recognize any right of diplomatic asylum. Moreover, the New Delhi government was not known for its fortitude in standing up to Moscow. Alliluyeva's continued presence in India would almost surely precipitate a confrontation with Indian authorities eager to please their Soviet friends.



New York Times ©

Svetlana Alliluyeva

Hostile Penetration

Perhaps no issue Helms faced while DCI threatened the Agency's vitality more seriously than the question of hostile penetration. Ironically, an actual penetration is not required to cripple an intelligence service. Merely the suspicion that an agency has been penetrated can shut down operations, mutilate leads, and destroy the underlying trust in one's colleagues every intelligence officer must possess.

When Anatoliy Golitsyn defected in 1961, he brought with him a wealth of information on KGB personnel, organization, and methods. His counterintelligence and penetration leads, however, were considerably less

helpful. Only in 1964, after the Counterintelligence Staff had assumed exclusive responsibility for his handling, did he become insistent that the KGB had successfully placed several high-level operatives within the Agency. This information, of course, squared perfectly with Angleton's own assumptions, and the Counterintelligence Staff was soon feeding Golitsyn its operational case files, a practice later DO investigators found an "extraordinary" breach of customary security procedures.[60] Before long Golitsyn had fingered specific individuals as likely Soviet agents.

By the end of 1964, Angleton had organized a series of meetings with the FBI to pursue Golitsyn's leads. After several fruitless months, however, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover lost patience and ordered his agents to break off contact with Golitsyn. With the single exception of one low-level employee who had not worked for CIA in several years, the Russian had failed to prove any of his allegations about KGB penetration. Golitysn himself, Hoover darkly hinted, could be a Soviet provocation. The FBI's withdrawal from the case dismayed Angleton but failed to shake his confidence in the accuracy of Golitsyn's accusations. Quietly he continued his search for evidence of treachery, unperturbed by the inability of a number of Soviet sources, Nosenko among them, to substantiate Golitsyn's information. These individuals, he explained, were all part of the KGB's disinformation program to counteract Golitsyn's leads.[61]

[60]The Freer Report, c. 1976.
[61]*Ibid.*;
[62]Leonard McCoy interview, 15 June 1984.

While his position gave Angleton unique power to take action against individuals whose allegiance he doubted, he was not alone in his belief that the KGB had successfully penetrated CIA. In February 1968 word reached Helms that a Soviet Bloc Division officer had told an FBI agent that [redacted] might be a Soviet plant. Helms called the offending officer in and thoroughly dressed him down for carrying these matters outside the Agency. At the same time, he directed Howard Osborn's Office of Security to reinvestigate [redacted] who was about to depart for his new post [redacted] Many years later, [redacted] would remember this ordeal: "Boy, they worked me over. It was a bitch."[63] But Security failed to discover any damning information, [redacted] In dealing with him [redacted] maintains, Helms never alluded to this episode and never even hinted that he had anything less than the fullest confidence in him.

Helms remembers the incident as well. "I felt that we owed any staff man against whom allegations of this kind were made not only the fullest kind of examination but the fullest opportunity to clear himself if he could," he explained many years later. The former DCI expressed abhorrence for what he saw as some of his predecessors' policy of getting rid of officers as soon as allegations of disloyalty surfaced:

> I felt that we owed them more than that . . . a better investigation, a more clear-cut decision one way or the other. . . . It isn't so much a question of being a civil libertarian. It's just honest-to-God fairness. . . . To have them smeared when sometimes there was no real basis for this was unfair, and I wanted to see justice done.[64]

Other Agency officers, however, resented the fact that [redacted] was forced to undergo the grueling Office of Security investigation. Gordon M. Stewart, who served as Inspector General under Helms, later recalled his reaction when he first heard Angleton describe the case against [redacted]

> You know, when you don't have a shred of evidence and you do the whole thing on circumstantial reasoning, you can name just about any damn reason that you want to, and . . . that's the way I sized that one up. It just seemed to me that it was a part of Jim's speculation. . . . It struck me as very odd. As far as I'm concerned, the case that Jim made [redacted]—well, it would have ranked as the last piece of reasoning you would bring into a case where you already had evidence. But it's certainly not the kind of thing that you would start off a case with.[65]

[redacted] interview, 31 May 1984.
[64]Helms interview, 30 May 1984.
[65]Gordon Stewart, interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 11 May 1984 (hereinafter cited as Stewart interview, 11 May 1984).

Even after the investigation cleared [redacted] Angleton—"still unconvinced"—urged [redacted] Apparently, the counterintelligence chief never recognized the incongruity of his belief that [redacted] working so hard to document Angleton's suspicions about Nosenko, was himself a Soviet agent. But this does suggest how convoluted matters had become, how pervasive was this fear of hostile penetration. Perhaps it was poetic justice that one of his own analysts eventually charged that Angleton himself was a Soviet plant—an accusation, fittingly enough, supported by no more evidence than that against [redacted]

Despite the lack of results, the hunt for a Soviet mole continued. [redacted] has remembered that, when he [redacted] as Soviet Bloc Division chief in 1968, one of his priorities was to work with Security to determine once and for all whether his Division had been penetrated. Despite an exhaustive search, he failed to uncover "one scrap of supportive evidence that there was or ever had been" a hostile penetration of his Division.[66] Eventually, except for Angleton and his allies both in and outside the Counterintelligence Staff, the paralyzing fear of treachery within the Agency subsided. By 1973, Helms could retire secure in the knowledge that no case for a current penetration of his Agency had withstood close examination.

Not all Western services could make that claim. The CIA was not the only intelligence agency in the 1960s preoccupied with the possibility of hostile penetration. The French, the British, and the Canadians, as well as some of the smaller services, all experienced their own crises of confidence during this period. In part these doubts reflected irrefutable evidence of actual penetration, in part only the general fears of the time. "Allied intelligence was brought about to a standstill by this thing," [redacted] recalls, as all the services interrupted their normal routines to resolve these concerns.[67] Fueling these doubts from Washington were James Angleton and Golitsyn.

In 1966, when Helms became DCI, allied counterintelligence officers still smarted from the jolts they had received earlier in the decade, when several of the Western services had uncovered high-level penetrations—MI6's George Blake, a spy ring centered in the British Admiralty, and Heinz Felfe's operation within West Germany's *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND). In 1963, Harold "Kim" Philby had fled to the Soviet Union, at last confirming suspicions that had festered for more than 10 years. In this charged atmosphere, few felt prepared to discount Golitsyn's insistent warnings that the British, French, and other services were still penetrated.

[redacted] interview, 14 June 1984.
[66] *Ibid.*

Helms did not actively involve himself in these controversies, but he kept informed, primarily through Angleton. For example, he followed the 1967-68 British investigations that resulted in a number of senior MI6 officers taking early retirement after irregularities about their pasts came to light. (None of these officers, however, was found to be disloyal.) He also received periodic briefings on what could have been a scandal far outstripping even the Philby disaster.

Helms and Angleton

Richard Helms assumed command of the CIA at a time when a preoccupation with Soviet deception and penetration wielded an influence on certain senior officers that can only be considered malign. Loyal Agency employees had come under suspicion of treachery solely on the basis of coincidence and flimsy circumstantial evidence. Ongoing operations against Soviet targets had been shut down, new ones stifled, by the conviction that the Kremlin, tipped off by a mole within CIA, had doubled most Agency assets. Valuable information supplied by defectors and longtime sources was being ignored, for fear that it was somehow tainted.

[68]Thomas Karamessines, Memorandum for the Record, 18 November 1970, with attachment.

[redacted]

Eventually—"and the inescapable irony of this seems entirely appropriate"—even those most outspoken in their warnings of Soviet duplicity found themselves suspected of disloyalty. [redacted] Bagley, Angleton, even Golitsyn, ultimately had to reckon with the one irreducible truth in the counterintelligence business: that no one is immune from suspicion. It was a classic example of the revolution devouring its own.

Helms never fully accepted the panicked warnings that the KGB had successfully placed its agents within CIA. In 1976, former DDCI Rufus Taylor was asked whether the possibility of a high-level penetration had particularly worried Helms:

> No, I never did get that impression at all. . . . I got the impression that he thought, well, it was a possibility, but the evidence that such a thing actually existed was lacking and he was quite reluctant to believe that, with the scanty evidence at hand, you could rely upon there being any such a penetration. In other words, he was quite skeptical of it.[71]

Taylor and other senior officers also confirm that Helms eventually came to believe that Golitsyn's apocalyptic views had adversely affected Angleton's judgment.

And yet the DCI continued to give his counterintelligence chief an extraordinarily free rein. Helms allowed, even encouraged Angleton to end-run Karamessines and report directly to the DCI's office. He tolerated Angleton's secret overseas trips, although they frequently disrupted ties between foreign services and Agency stations. [redacted]

[redacted]

times, Angleton's unwavering support for Golitsyn's allegations, his patronizing attitude toward those less alarmist than he, and his aspersions on the loyalties of certain allied intelligence officials created problems. [redacted]

[redacted]

[70] [redacted] Memorandum to Chief/SB, 28 April 1969.
[71] Taylor interview, 1976.

Helms seems to have stood aside. Even after learning that Angleton had deliberately undermined the effectiveness of an important CIA station, [redacted] Helms refused to restrain his counterintelligence chief.

But the DCI's backing went further than merely declining to rein Angleton in; when forced to choose among contending subordinates, he frequently adopted Angleton's position as his own. A program that Helms inherited, which monitored domestic dissidents, provides an example of this. Since 1952, working part of the time with the FBI, CIA had conducted a mail-opening program, mainly based in New York. The operation had originated as a means of identifying Americans who were cooperating with the Soviet Union and its intelligence agencies against the United States. By the late 1960s, however, it had taken on the additional purpose of domestic surveillance directed against political activists, protest organizations, and extremist groups. Within CIA there was considerable debate over the program's value to Agency intelligence operations, as well as substantial concern that disclosure of Agency involvement in this sort of activity would create serious embarrassment. The fact that the FBI had withdrawn from the program in 1966—"although continuing to share in the CIA's take"—further suggested that the operation's value did not warrant its risks. In 1969 an Inspector General's survey formally recommended that CIA consider ending the program. Nevertheless, when assured that the FBI continued to value the program (even as it refused to allot personnel or funding for it), Helms rejected the Inspector General's recommendations either to end the program or submit it to regular reevaluations.[72]

Two years later, the Chief Postal Inspector raised the issue once more. On 19 May 1971, Helms met with several of his chief lieutenants to consider the matter. Deputy Director for Plans Karamessines forcefully argued that the program should be terminated, in light of the risk of exposure and the project's minimal value to CIA. Karamessines's position was seconded by the Director of Security. Angleton, however, whose CI Staff had been running the program since the mid-1950s, vigorously argued otherwise. Sure, there were risks, he conceded, but CIA "can and should continue to live with them." Besides, he added, the Counterintelligence Staff viewed the operations as *foreign* surveillance.[73] On 2 June, Helms met with the Postmaster General to review the project's future. He also discussed the program with Attorney General John Mitchell, one of President Nixon's closest advisers. When neither Cabinet officer objected to the program's continuation, Helms sided with Angleton and granted it a reprieve.

[72]Church committee, Book III, p. 599.
[73]*Ibid.*, p. 601.

It may not have been a wise decision. One of James Schlesinger's first actions after becoming DCI in early 1973 was to close down the operation. Helms was subsequently castigated for not taking this step much earlier. The Rockefeller Commission found that "the CIA's primary purpose eventually became participation with the FBI in internal security functions. Accordingly, the CIA's participation was prohibited under the National Security Act." Once again, Angleton seems to have served his chief badly.[74] Why did Helms continue to support a man whose judgment in retrospect appears flawed in so many respects? This question's answer is difficult to divine, but a few facts appear certain. To Richard Helms, counterintelligence was an essential task requiring extraordinary knowledge and intellectual acuity. In Angleton, he had the acknowledged expert. Surely this was not an asset to be regarded lightly. Nor was his esteem for Angleton based solely on exploits from the distant past. Angleton's role during the 1967 Six-Day War provided Helms with a more recent reminder of just how valuable his CI chief could be.

The subsequent accuracy of this prediction established Helms's reputation in the Johnson White House and swept him into the inner circle of the President's advisers. The experience almost certainly constituted the high point of Helms's service as Director. It also further solidified Angleton's standing in the DCI's estimation.

According to DDCI Taylor, Helms believed "that Jim was a man obsessed and that he, Helms, deplored that obsession but thought that Angleton was so valuable and so difficult to replace that his other attributes outweighed the disadvantages of the obsession."[75] Angleton was a useful devil's advocate, Helms told another officer. Why dump him, in the absence of an overriding reason?

By the late 1960s, however, had Angleton himself not provided that overriding reason? By then many senior Agency officers had concluded that Angleton had outlived his usefulness, that he had stayed too long in one position. Important responsibilities went neglected, while the counterintelligence chief went off on tangents having little to do with the Counterintelligence Staff's original mission. Angleton's staff almost completely ignored its crucial task of disseminating finished counterintelligence and counterespionage information to the intelligence community.

[74]Rockefeller Commission, p. 21. It bears notice that evidently neither Helms nor any of his subordinates considered asking the Chief Postal Inspector to lie to Congress and deny knowledge of such a program.
[75]Taylor interview, 1976.

Only rarely did Angleton's office provide staff guidance for the CIA's operating divisions. Angleton "considered himself almost the ultimate customer for most of his own material," one top-level officer has stated.[76] He refused, for example, to disseminate within the Agency fifty-some reports

[redacted]

Nor was Angleton always a loyal subordinate. After Helms had personally mandated Nosenko's rehabilitation in 1969, Angleton for four years refused [redacted] questions about the Agency's new position. This petulance no doubt contributed to the strain in [redacted] security relations that marked the period. Near the end of 1970, Angleton complained to the Agency's Chief of Station [redacted] that one of the latter's officers had, [redacted] "forcefully pushed his belief" that Nosenko was bona fide. This was a matter, Angleton cabled, "about which we are not prepared to reverse ourselves or make a final decision." The offending officer must be told that further discussions of this nature would not be tolerated.[77]

But ultimately, one goes back to the blighted careers, the damaged lives, [redacted] A later Agency study found Nosenko's long incarceration [redacted] "morally indefensible." [redacted] But one need not accept these judgments to deplore the effects Angleton's grand theories of deception and conspiracy had on Agency activities. The experience of Richard Kovich bears witness to their destructiveness.

A number of former Agency officers who knew both men have speculated on the reasons why Helms tolerated Angleton's malign influence for so long. Some have suggested that Helms failed to recognize the seriousness of the problem. Angleton, in the early years, had been so innovative and so far ahead of everyone else in the counterintelligence field, they maintain, that Helms never fully realized the injurious effects of his counterintelligence chief's "obsession."

[76]James Critchfield, interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 8 May 1984 (hereafter cited as Critchfield interview, 8 May 1984).
[77]Cable, Headquarters 486, 24 November 1970.
[78]Hart, "The Monster Plot."

Others concede that Helms was aware of the difficulties Angleton was creating but deliberately declined to take action. Gordon Stewart, Helms's Inspector General, has tied this inaction to the DCI's administrative methods:

> The key to Helms on many aspects of management is his very pronounced conservatism—to the point, you might say, of passivity. . . . If you didn't have to deal with a problem, you would rather not deal with it. And I think the problem that . . . Angleton represented was one that he was rather pleased just to say, he must have said this: On balance it's better to have him around than not to have him around. . . . [Helms] probably also felt that it would take God Himself to change Angleton. So he put up with what were quite clearly problems.[79]

Some observers have pointed to the close relationship Helms and Angleton enjoyed since the early days of CIA. In the years after Dulles passed Helms over for DDP in favor of Bissell, these ties were solidified, as two distinct factions, centered around Helms and Bissell, emerged within the Clandestine Service. The division was so obvious that the secretaries even grouped individuals into "we" and "they" categories. Angleton was firmly within the Helms camp. For Helms, the professional in a profession where trust and loyalty are not lightly given, these memories of shared battles were immensely important. Moreover, moving against Angleton would have cost Helms dearly within the tightly knit world of Washington intelligence officers. "I don't think Dick was ever prepared to pay whatever price he would have felt was involved," one longtime friend of both men has said. For Helms to have acted against Angleton "would have cost Dick some votes in his own constituency. Dick Helms is a consummate Washington politician, and I know no one . . . who has more skillfully developed his own support mechanisms in Washington than Dick."[80] In short, moving against Angleton would have entailed substantial political as well as personal costs.

Still, Helms might have done so, except for one overriding consideration. One returns again and again to the fact—"still generally accepted in spite of immense efforts over the years to disprove it"—that no significant penetration of CIA had ever occurred. Helms accorded Angleton much of the credit for this accomplishment, although many Agency officers maintain that it had been achieved despite, rather than because of, Angleton's long

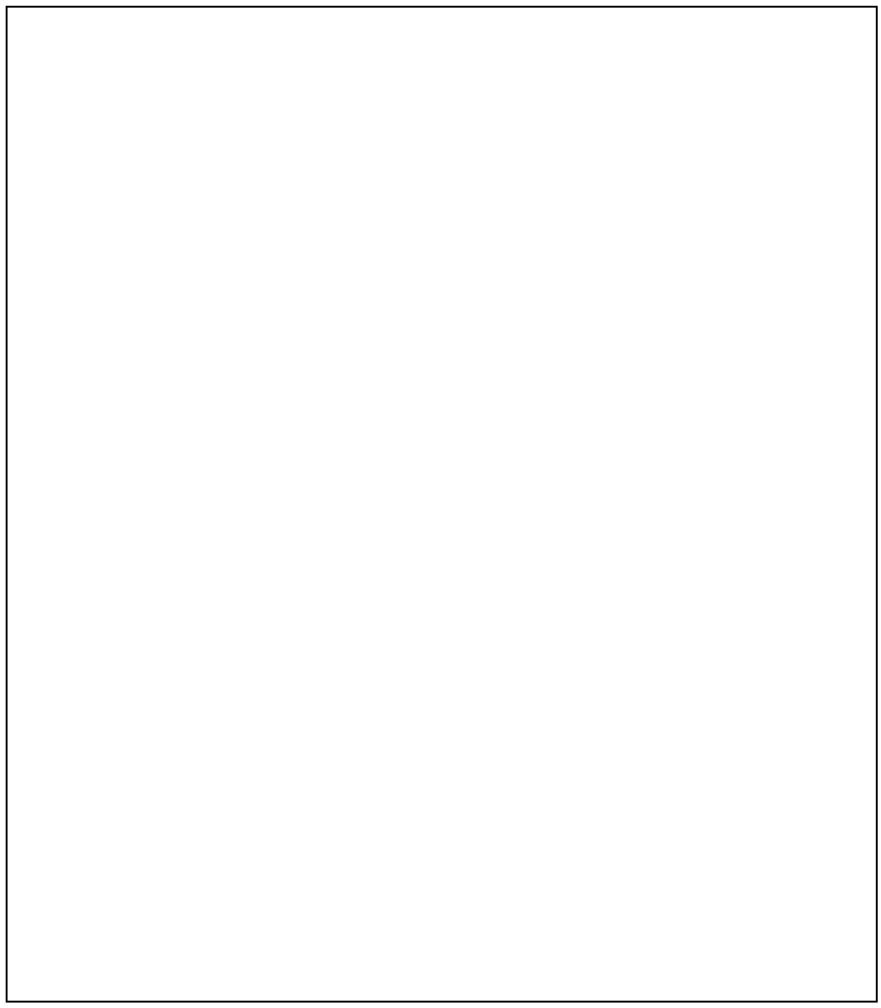
[79]Stewart interview, 11 May 1984.
[80]Critchfield interview, 8 May 1984.

tenure as chief of CIA counterintelligence. But for Richard Helms, this record of inviolability was the bottom line. As he defined the issue, the choice Angleton imposed was not one of good versus bad counterintelligence, but between too much counterintelligence and not enough. And in that situation, Helms would—"always, intuitively"—settle for the former. Today, long after these events, the debate over the wisdom of this choice rages on, fueling animosities and dividing intelligence professionals as do few other issues from the Helms era.

Chapter 6

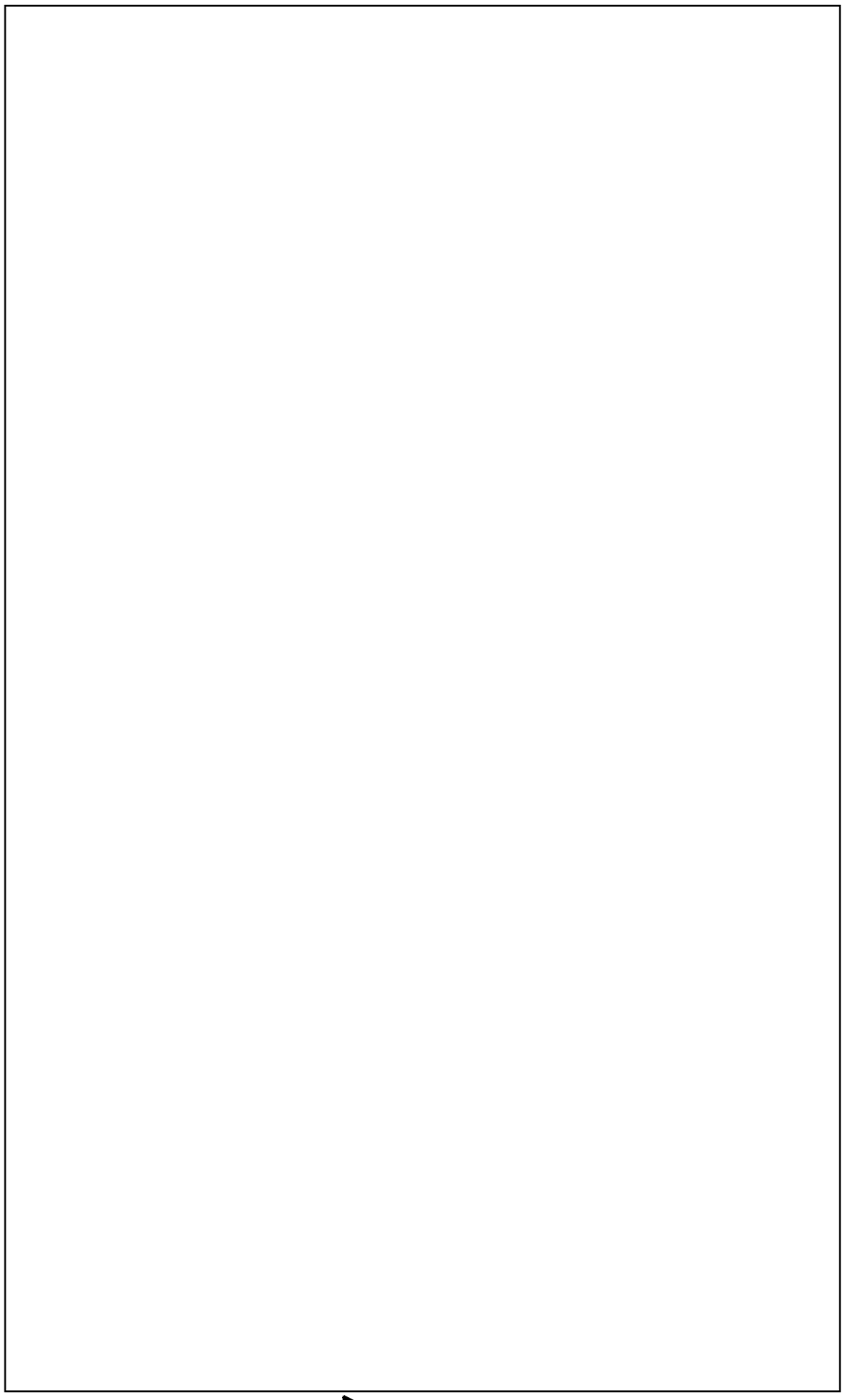
The Israeli Account

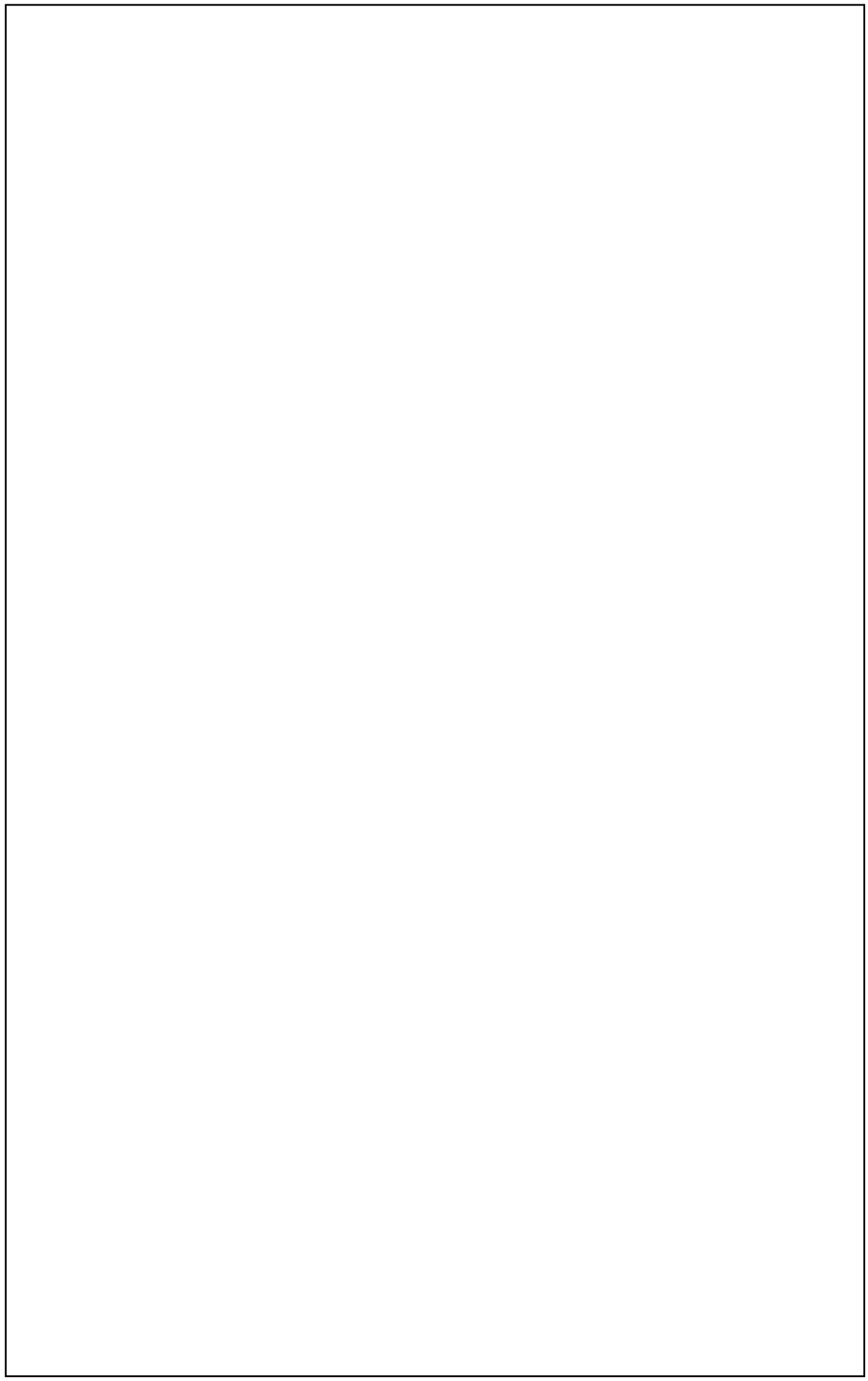
Robert M. Hathaway

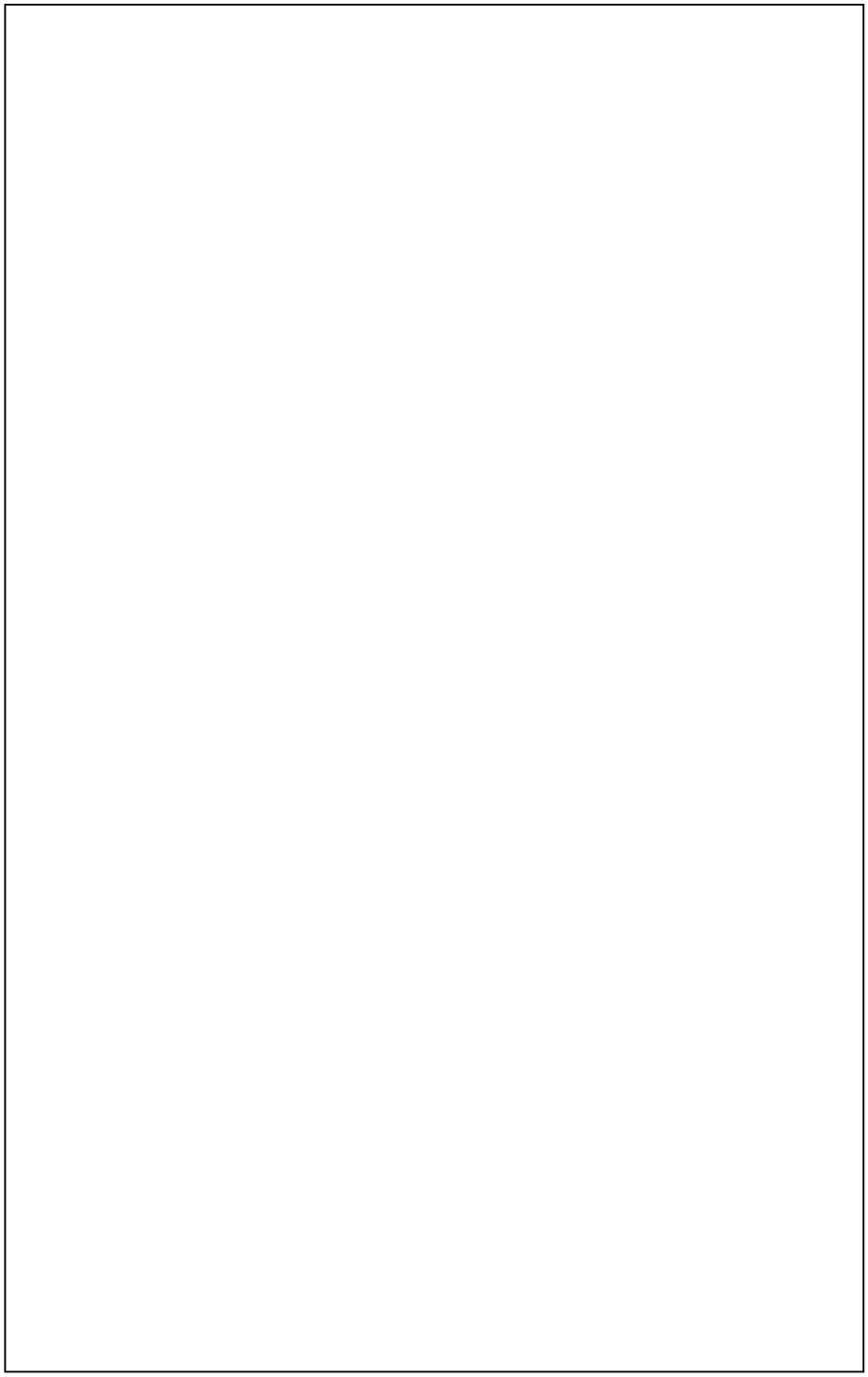


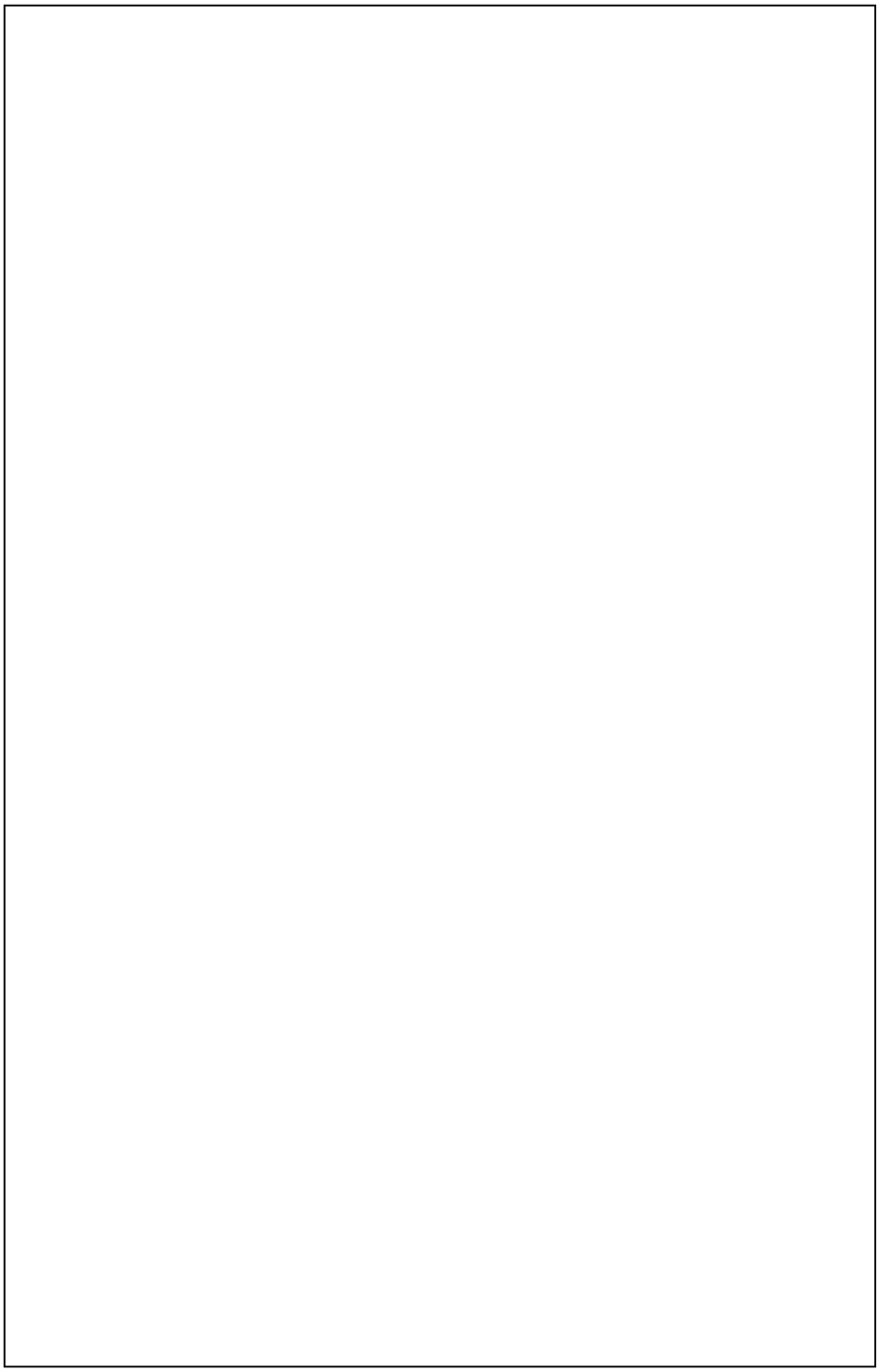
AP ©

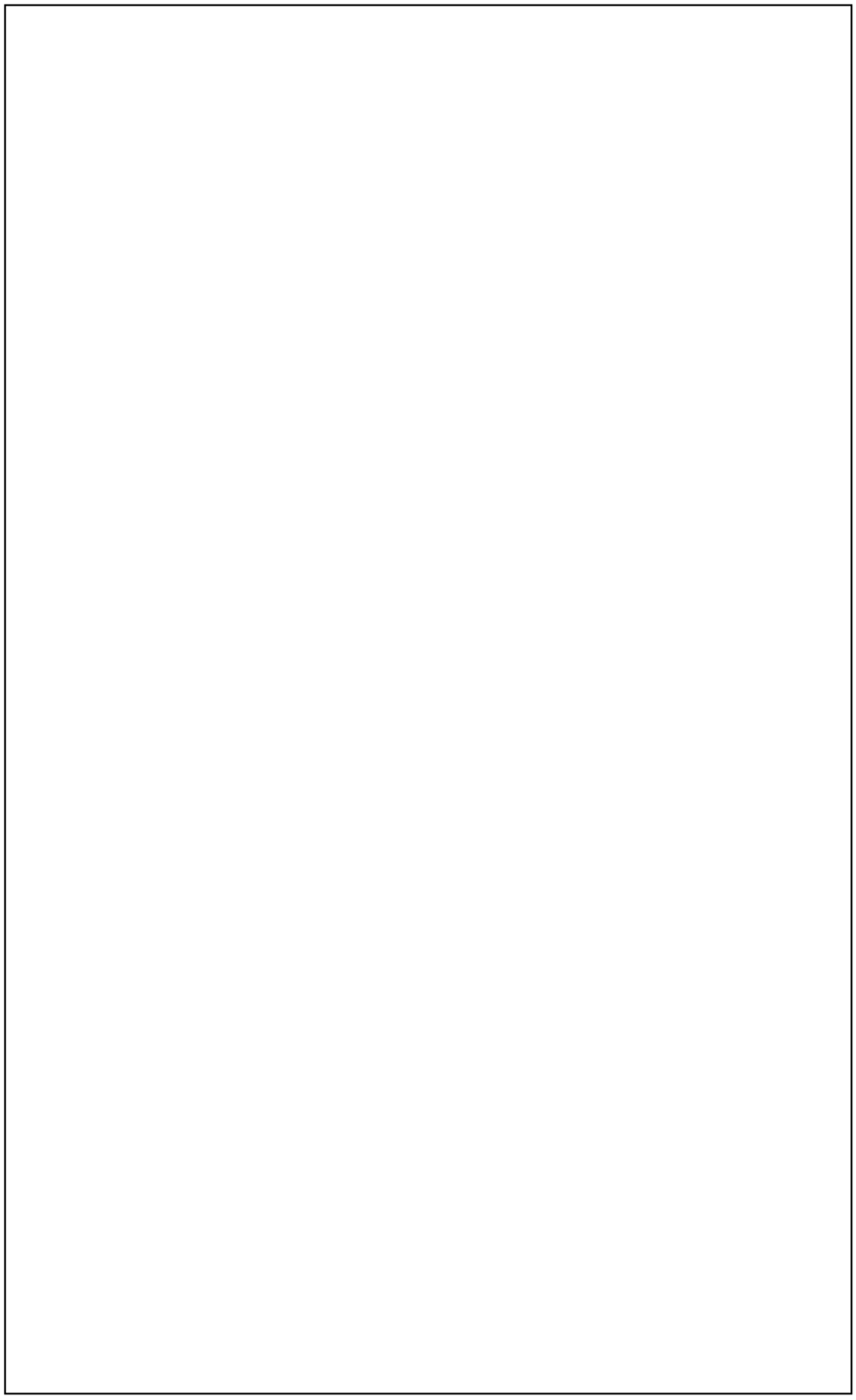
James J. Angleton

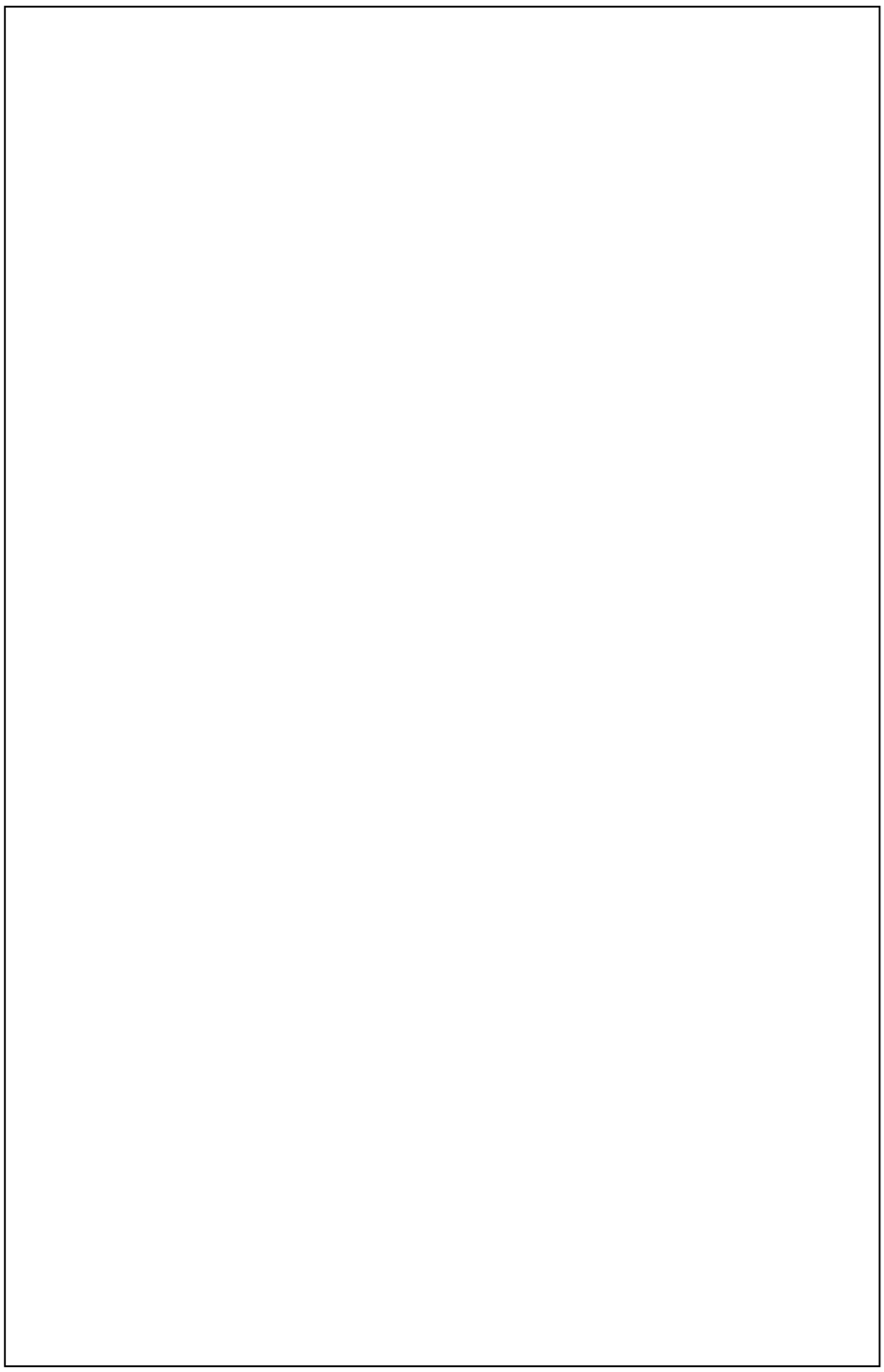












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The 1967 Six-Day War

In many respects, the high point of Richard Helms's tenure as DCI came in the early days of June 1967. On 5 June, Israeli military forces launched a surprise attack against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, bringing to its climax a crisis that had been steadily building for months. For the Johnson administration, tied by political interest and emotional commitment to Israel, the Israeli strike raised grave questions: Could the Israelis triumph without active American assistance? Even should they win, would a costly victory sap Israel's future vitality? What role had the Soviet Union played in bringing on the crisis? How would Moscow react if Russia's Arab friends faced imminent defeat? What steps should the United States now take? Should Washington airlift military supplies to Israel—even at the cost of further undermining the American position in the Arab world?

For the Johnson administration, sound and speedy answers to these questions were imperative. Even before fighting broke out on 5 June, the Israelis had been pressing the White House for public statements of support; there had even been cautious suggestions of joint military operations against the Arabs. Faced on the one hand with great uncertainties, and on the other with high stakes and intense pressures, Lyndon Johnson, Helms recalls, finally "came to understand what intelligence could do for him."[15]

For Helms, Middle Eastern developments first took on crisis proportions on 23 May 1967. A week earlier Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had ordered the United Nations peacekeeping force out of the Sinai and quickly moved Egyptian troops into the areas that United Nations units had vacated. On 22 May, Nasser announced that the Gulf of Aqaba would, henceforth, be closed to Israeli shipping, effectively cutting off Israel's port at Eilat. [redacted] On the morning of 23 May, Johnson summoned Helms from a briefing of the House Armed

[redacted] Interview, 15 November 1984; [redacted] Interview, 16 November 1984.
[15] Helms Oral History, 4 April 1969, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

Services Committee to ask for an analysis of the escalating crisis. Within four hours Helms had two papers for the President, one on overall Arab and Israeli military capabilities, the other on the state of US knowledge about affairs in the Middle East. Israeli forces, Helms informed the President, enjoyed "over-all superiority" both on the ground and in the air.[16]

In the days that followed, Helms repeatedly updated this assessment for the White House. These revisions considerably sharpened the initial appreciation of 23 May, but did not alter the thrust of its conclusions. Other agencies, notably the State Department, took a much less sanguine view, fearing that the surrounded Israelis would find the going far tougher than CIA analysts conceded. To muddle the situation further, Tel Aviv on 25 May chimed in with its own estimate, which described Arab intentions in sinister terms and professed to see Soviet machinations in the background. Directed by Helms to comment on the Israeli assessment, the Office of National Estimates (ONE) responded, "We do not believe that the Israeli appreciation . . . was a serious estimate of the sort they would submit to their own high officials." Rather, they concluded, it was "probably a gambit," intended to persuade the United States to provide Israel with military supplies, make a greater public commitment to Tel Aviv, approve Israeli military initiatives, and put more pressure on Nasser.[17]

Reassured, the DCI stood his ground. On the evening of 25 May, Secretary of State Dean Rusk asked Helms if he concurred in the judgments Agency analysts were making. Told that he did, Rusk observed, "Dick, there is only one thing I want to say—as LaGuardia once remarked, if this is a mistake, it's a beaut."[18]

Helms and Rusk then proceeded to the Cabinet Room to meet with President Johnson and his other key national security advisers. The President read the Israeli estimate and the ONE's short rejoinder and turned to Gen. Earle Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs. "You fellows think this is okay?" he asked. When the general said yes, Johnson told Helms and Wheeler to "scrub this thing down" once more and report back to the White House. Returning to Headquarters that evening, Helms told the Board of National Estimates to produce a coordinated assessment forthwith. By the following afternoon, the Board had a new paper, written in collaboration with the Defense Intelligence Agency. Its message echoed their assessment of the previous day and told Johnson that the Israelis would handily whip any possible combination of Arab foes. A greatly relieved Lyndon Johnson at last accepted the Estimate and declined to take a public stand behind the Israelis.[19]

[16]J. L. Freshwater [William K. Parmenter], "Policy and Intelligence: The Arab-Israeli War," *Studies in Intelligence* 13 (winter 1969).

[17]Memorandum for [redacted] 25 May 1967.

[18]The quote comes from Freshwater, "Policy and Intelligence." Helms has often repeated this story, in essentially the same words. See Helms interviews of 21 April 1982 and 8 November 1984.

[19]Richard Helms, interview by R. Jack Smith, Washington, DC, 21 April 1982 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 21 April 1982).

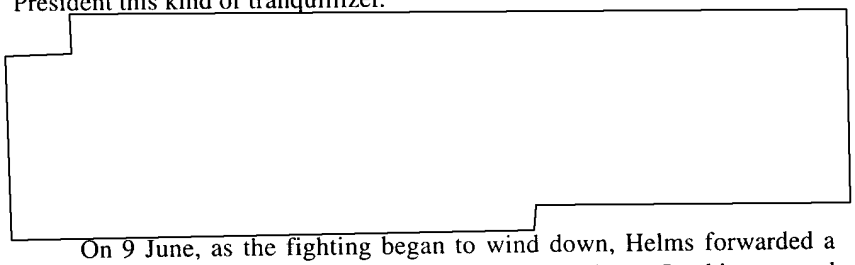
On 1 June, four days before the outbreak of war, Helms received a visit [redacted] The following day the DCI summarized their conversation for the President. The time for decision had come, [redacted] and Tel Aviv would almost surely decide to strike. Her failure to move sooner, largely because of American pressures for restraint, had lost Israel the advantage of surprise, a loss she would pay for in casualties. Even so, [redacted] (in a tone notably less shrill than Tel Aviv's alarmist estimate of 25 May), Israel wanted nothing from the United States other than diplomatic support, measures to ensure that the Soviet Union be kept out of the conflict, and a continuation of weapons shipments already in the supply pipeline. Events of the past 48 hours, Helms concluded for the President, "can be interpreted as an ominous portent, considering the Israelis' military capability to strike with little or no warning at a time of their choosing."[20] Three days later, the Israeli attack caught the entire Arab world by surprise, but Lyndon Johnson was able to tell the Congressional leadership with some smugness that he had been expecting Israel's move. "It was," Helms subsequently conceded, "a fairly tidy package."[21]

Shortly after 0300 on 5 June, Helms was roused from bed by the news that the fighting in the Middle East had at last begun. By midmorning he was on the Hill, briefing the leadership and allaying Congressional anxieties about Israeli capabilities. In the following days the DCI was heavily engaged in Middle Eastern affairs. Sensing that CIA had to speak with a single voice in this rapidly moving situation, he designated ONE analyst John F. Devlin as the Agency's focal point for most matters relating to the war (except that Angleton, in this as in everything else, continued to report directly and exclusively to the DCI). To ensure maximum control, Helms also had all communications routed through his own office, effectively cutting his DDP, Desmond FitzGerald, out of the action. Helms ran "a very tight operation" throughout the crisis period, one subordinate has recalled.[22]

For his daily meetings at the White House, Helms required a continual updating of the Agency's intelligence and frequent conferences with Angleton and other key subordinates. Helms also directed the writing and distribution of numerous situation reports, intelligence memorandums, and Special National Intelligence Estimates (SNIEs). (The Office of Current Intelligence alone produced five separate situation reports each day, with additional spot reports and special annexes as required.) Nor did Helms hesitate to intervene personally in the preparation of these assessments. For example, he found portions of a paper on Soviet attitudes and intentions in the Middle

[20]Helms, Memorandum for the President, 2 June 1967.
[21]Helms interview, 21 April 1982.
[22]James H. Critchfield, interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 11 December 1984 (hereafter cited as Critchfield interview, 11 December 1984.

East "too pallid and too confident" and returned it to the ONE. "You may be right," the DCI observed, "but I am not prepared as of June 8 to give the President this kind of tranquillizer."[23]



On 9 June, as the fighting began to wind down, Helms forwarded a somewhat different type of memorandum to the President. Looking toward the postwar situation in the Middle East, he proposed that the United States Government "cease referring to 'the Arabs' in its public pronouncements, using instead the term Egyptian, Jordanian, Moroccan, Algerian, etc." Encouraging local nationalism, he explained, "may serve in some measure to distract the Arab peoples from their focus on the Arab world and on Arab vs. Israeli." This, in turn, might reduce Nasser's influence in the region. While no evidence suggests that anything came of this proposal, it does demonstrate an increasingly confident Helms, willing to enter into policymaking realms normally outside a DCI's range of responsibilities.[24]

For the Johnson administration, the "moment of truth" of the crisis arrived on 10 June. Early that morning a message from Soviet premier Aleksei Kosygin began coming in to the White House Situation Room over the hot line. If the Israelis did not halt their advance across the Golan Heights, the Russian leader threatened, the Soviet Union would take all "necessary actions, including military."[25] Helms remembers the chill that settled over the room. "The atmosphere was tense. The conversation was conducted in the lowest voices I have ever heard," the DCI later recalled.[26]

Briefly, the senior figures present contemplated the possibility of a major East-West confrontation. While Johnson momentarily left the room, Helms, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, and Llewellyn Thompson (the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union, who happened to be in Washington at the time), discussed possible American responses. One action rapidly recommended itself to all three. Why not dispatch the Sixth Fleet to the eastern Mediterranean, they asked Johnson on his return. Such a signal change in orders would convey American purposefulness to the Soviets without placing the Kremlin in a position where retreat would entail public humiliation. Johnson enthusiastically endorsed the gambit, the

[23]Helms, Memorandum for Chairman, BNE, 8 June 1967.
[24]Helms, Memorandum for the President, 9 June 1967.
[25]Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, 1971), p. 302.
[26]Helms, Memorandum for the Record, quoted in Donald Neff, *Warriors for Jerusalem*, pp. 279-280. Also see Helms Oral History, 4 April 1969.

fleet was rerouted, Moscow received the intended message, and a Soviet-American confrontation was averted. Later that same day, the belligerents accepted a cease-fire, and a peace of sorts returned to the Middle East.

CIA's performance during these days stands out as one of the Agency's truly impressive successes in an institutional lifespan now approaching four decades. "The finest, across-the-board execution of our mission at every level that I have seen in my twenty years with the Central Intelligence Agency," Helms wrote to his Deputy Directors a few days after the war's end.[27] In matters concerning the likely timing, duration, and outcome of the fighting, CIA analysts were nearly flawless in their judgments. They were right in doubting that the Soviets would openly intervene in the conflict and in doubting that the Egyptians would use chemical weapons, a point of some concern in the days before the fighting broke out. Finally, CIA estimators were ready to stand alone in their judgments if need be. They not only counseled that [redacted] they also disputed State Department views on both the timing of the war and the balance of military forces in the Middle East.

In later years, Helms would credit the Six-Day War with dramatically altering his standing in the Johnson White House. The precision and timeliness of the Agency's reporting enabled the President to resist pressures for a more public commitment of American support for Israel. Johnson, Helms would recall, "was enormously relieved to be let off that hook." For the first time in his presidency, LBJ realized "that intelligence had a role in his life, and an important [role] at that. . . . This was the first time that he was really sort of jarred by the fact that 'those intelligence fellows had some insight that these other fellows don't have.'" From that time forward Helms regularly joined the President's Tuesday luncheons, where Johnson and his closest advisers hammered out many of the nation's principal national security policies. As Helms himself has observed, invitation to these informal sessions ushered him into the administration's "magic inner circle."[28]

CIA achievements during this crisis are all the more striking in light of the Agency's failure six years later to forecast the Yom Kippur war. Of course, the two situations differed in important respects: in 1967 the decision for war was Israel's and had a certain military logic to it, while in 1973 the decision lay with Cairo and from a strictly military standpoint appeared to make little sense. [redacted]

[27]Helms, Memorandum for the four Deputy Directors, 14 June 1967.
[28]Helms interview, 21 April 1982.

Moreover, in 1967 Helms was able both to determine precisely what concerned Johnson and to tailor Agency reports to answer the President's questions. Angleton remembers that Helms specifically asked whether it would not be wiser to qualify their judgments a bit. When the DCI observed, "We're really throwing everything on this one," Angleton advised boldness. "[I]t only takes a 'maybe,'" he remembers telling Helms, "[and] you don't get the direct attention of the recipient. They begin to have a hundred thoughts rather than one thought." According to Angleton, Helms accepted this reasoning—"you know how Dick is: he just wanted to absolutely double-check that this represented the facts"—and sent the assessment forward without qualifications.[29]

As for the accuracy of the information it fed the White House, CIA had done its homework well in advance. Nearly two decades after these events, retired Agency officers still recall the careful spadework in the months before the crisis by Waldo Dubberstein of the Office of Current Intelligence, who kept a running log of the two sides' relative strengths and readiness. That the principal officers involved in Middle Eastern affairs—Angleton, Critchfield, Dubberstein, [redacted]—each had long experience in the region undoubtedly helped them to read the situation accurately. Finally, once the crisis hit, CIA was able to move with great speed. On 23 May, for instance, the Agency's [redacted] turned out two papers in less than four hours. Similarly, the ONE needed less than a day to produce and coordinate the key 26 May paper that persuaded Johnson that Israel needed no special American assistance.

One puzzling aspect about the CIA role during these days remains. Numerous Agency participants, including Helms, Angleton, and [redacted] recall that CIA was very specific in telling the White House that the war would last one week. The end of hostilities after six days, they remember, gave the Agency an aura of prescience, and no one was more impressed than Lyndon Johnson, who then drew Helms into his inner circle. This story is widely accepted within the Agency and frequently crops up in discussions of the high points in CIA history.

But the documents these officers cite—usually the 26 May ONE paper or [redacted]—make no such precise prediction. Indeed, no such document can be found in any of the Agency's records. The Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library in Texas has also been unable to substantiate this claim, while neither Johnson's memoirs nor a National Security Council history drawn up shortly after the war mention any seven-day prediction. Finally, a classified article [redacted].

[29]Angleton interview, 1 March 1985.

[redacted] explains how estimative precision was sacrificed in the process of coordination.[30]

Helms believes that the Agency's prediction of seven days was put forward in its 26 May paper, "Military Capabilities of Israel and the Arab States," which was produced by a coordinated effort of the ONE, [redacted] and the Defense Intelligence Agency. In fact, original drafts of this paper had said that Israel would need "2-3 days" to break through the Sinai defenses and "7-9 days" to reach the canal. These figures, however, did not survive the coordination debate. The finished paper estimated only that the Israelis would attain air superiority over the Sinai 24 hours after taking the initiative, or in "2-3 days" if the Egyptians struck first. It then observed that Israeli armored forces could breach Egypt's forward lines in the Sinai within "several days," at which point they would need time to regroup and resupply before pressing on to the canal.[31]

Although it is conceivable that Helms conveyed a seven-day prediction to Johnson orally, the former DCI is emphatic in recalling that the number was part of a written estimate. In his recollection, Helms may possibly have confused the earlier drafts of the 26 May paper with the final draft. In any case, all of the documentary evidence indicates that, contrary to Agency folklore, CIA never issued a precise seven-day prediction for what has since been called the Six-Day War. It is, nevertheless, clear that in this crisis CIA provided the President with timely, accurate—and extraordinarily useful—intelligence that elevated the Agency's and Helms's stature in the Johnson White House almost literally overnight.

Of Helms's role during the Liberty episode at the height of the war, little needs to be said. On the morning of 8 June, a member [redacted] received a frantic telephone call from the Pentagon war room. The Liberty, a Navy communications ship carrying highly sophisticated surveillance gear, was under attack in the eastern Mediterranean. American fighter aircraft, the caller continued, had been scrambled with orders to "shoot to kill" in defense of the vessel. The astonished DI analyst taking the call immediately relayed this information to the DCI. As the situation unfolded, it became evident that Israeli jet fighters and torpedo boats had launched the attack, leaving a badly crippled Liberty with 34 dead and well over a hundred wounded. Although Israeli authorities in Tel Aviv immediately apologized for the grievous "accident," many informed Americans soon came to believe that the assault had been anything but accidental.

[30]Freshwater, "Policy and Intelligence."
[31]*Ibid.*

CIA initially resisted this judgment.

An "overzealous pilot," this paper suggested, might have mistaken the American vessel for the Egyptian transport "El Quseir." Eight days later, another Intelligence Memorandum concluded that the attack "was not made in malice toward the US and was by mistake."[32] But the cumulative weight of the evidence rapidly undermined this position, leading the DDCI, Admiral Taylor, to write Helms:

> To me, the picture thus far presents the distinct possibility that the Israelis *knew* that 'Liberty' might be their target and attacked anyway, either through confusion in Command and Control or through deliberate disregard of instructions on the part of subordinates.[33]

Helms played no role in the subsequent board of inquiry that looked into the matter, but eventually concluded that there could be no doubt that the Israelis knew exactly what they were doing in attacking the Liberty. Why they felt the need to do so, and who ordered the attack remain questions Helms to this day cannot answer.[34]

The 1967 war between Israel and its Arab neighbors also presented Helms's CIA with a fleeting opportunity to play the unaccustomed role of peacemaker. Ultimately, of course, nothing came of this opportunity, and it joined the lengthy catalogue of Middle East "might-have-beens." But because they raised such tantalizing possibilities, if only for a moment, CIA efforts should not be entirely dismissed.

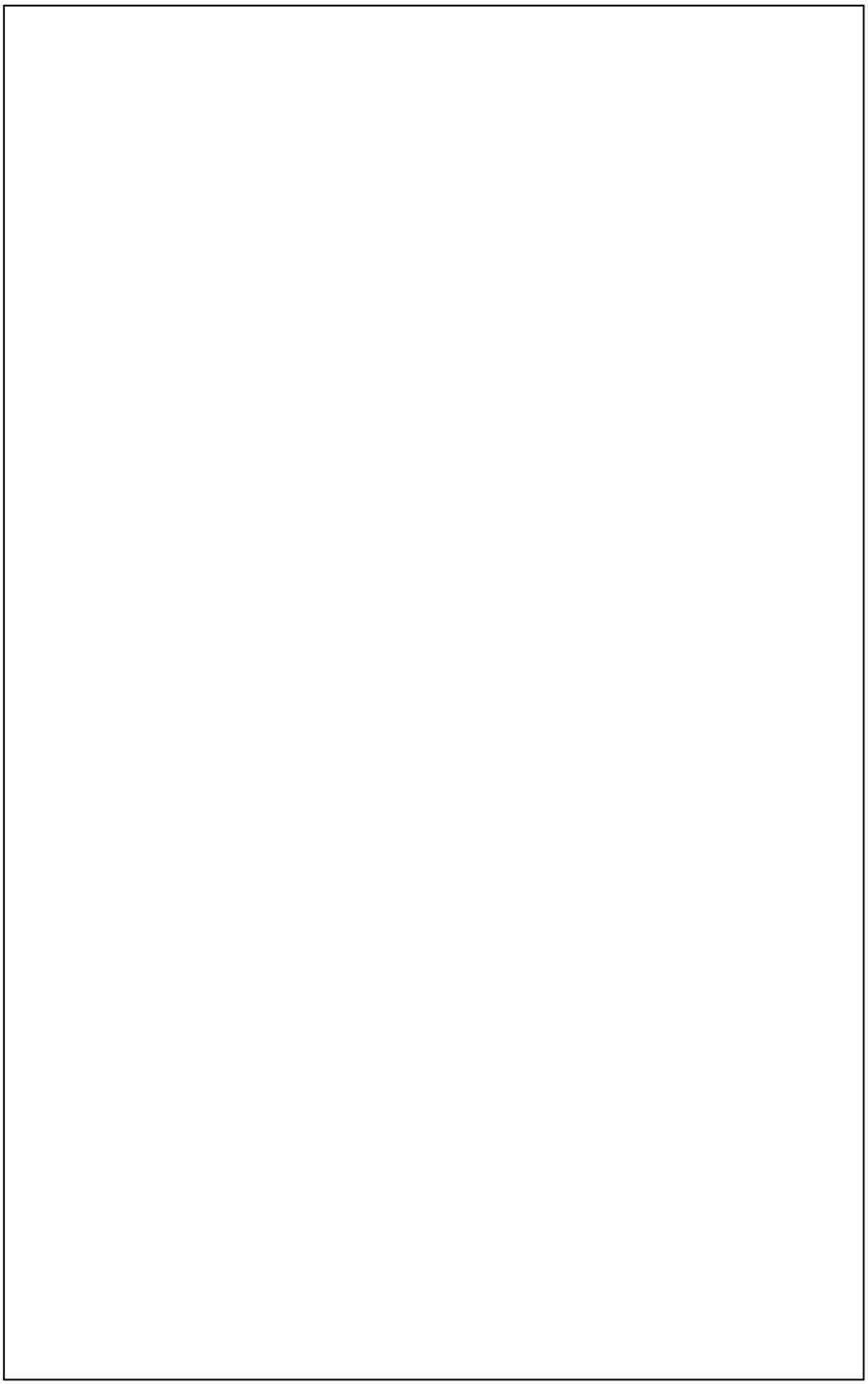
In the immediate aftermath of the fighting, James Angleton found himself increasingly disturbed by the prospect of an endless cycle of war and more war in the Middle East. With this in mind he composed what those who saw it remember as an eloquent plea for some dramatic move to break through this destructive pattern. In a blind memorandum for the DCI, Angleton observed that, with the Arab countries prostrate and in disarray, little blocked the Soviet Union from making new incursions into the Middle East. The present moment, he urged, offered an unprecedented opportunity to build an anti-Soviet alliance consisting of Israel and some of the conservative Arab states such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The whole thing depended upon urgency, Angleton continued; the longer Israel occupied the territories captured from the Arabs, the less willing Tel Aviv would be to give them up.

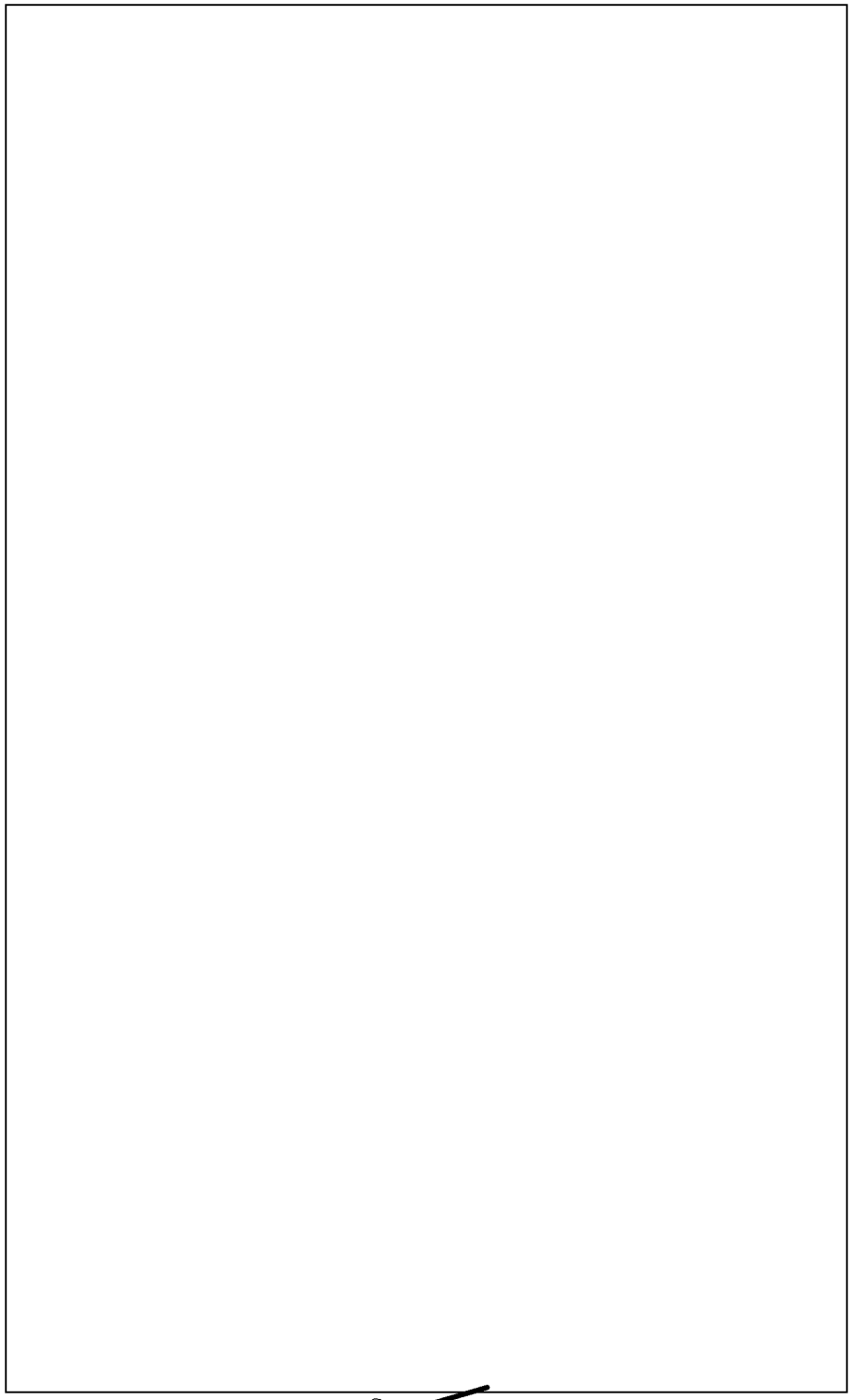
[32]"The Israeli Attack on the USS Liberty," 13 June 1967; "The Israeli Statement on the Attack on the USS Liberty," 21 June 1967.
[33]Admiral Taylor, DDCI, Memorandum for the Director, 22 June 1967.
[34]Helms interview, 15 November 1984.

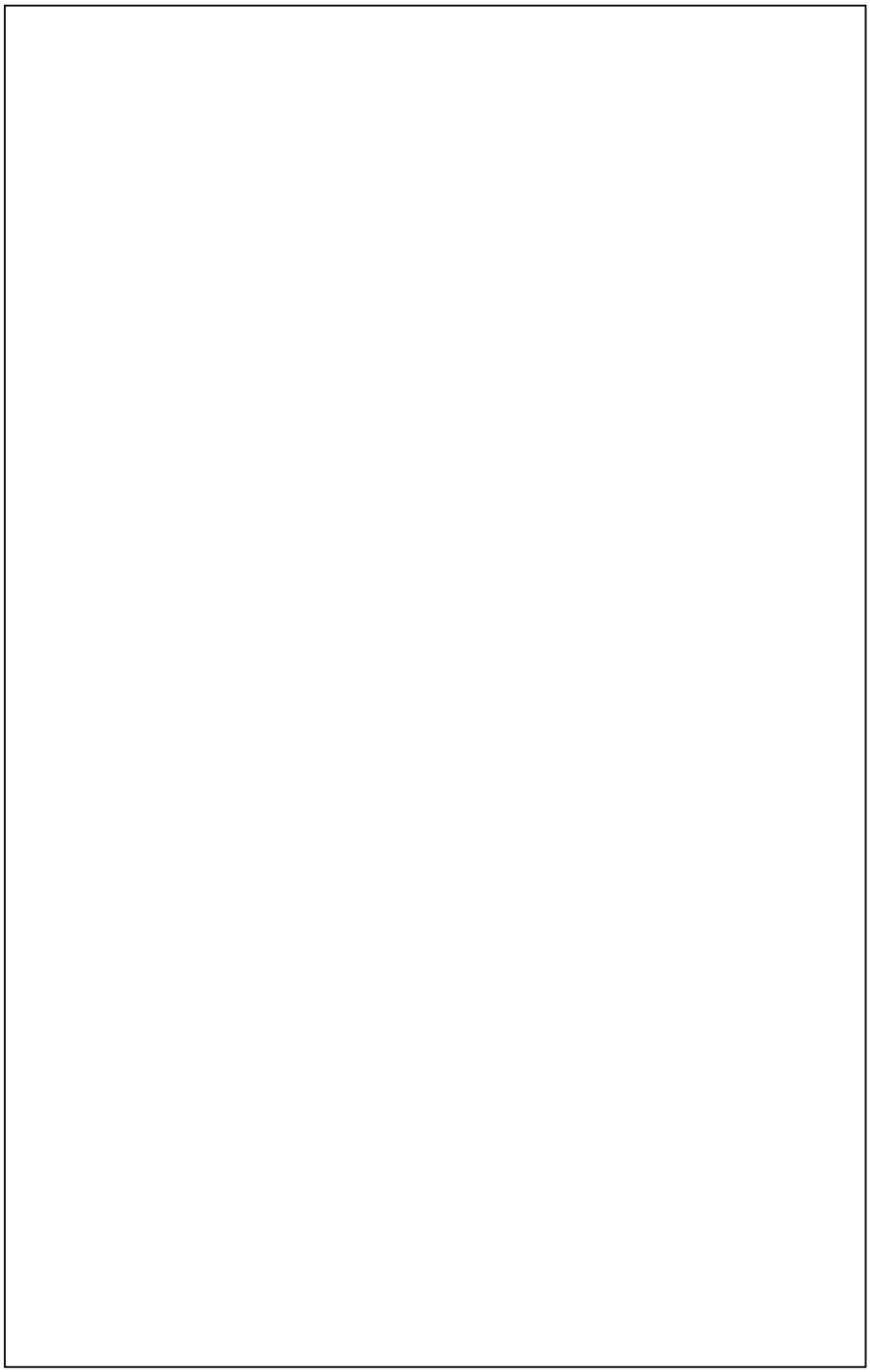
[redacted]

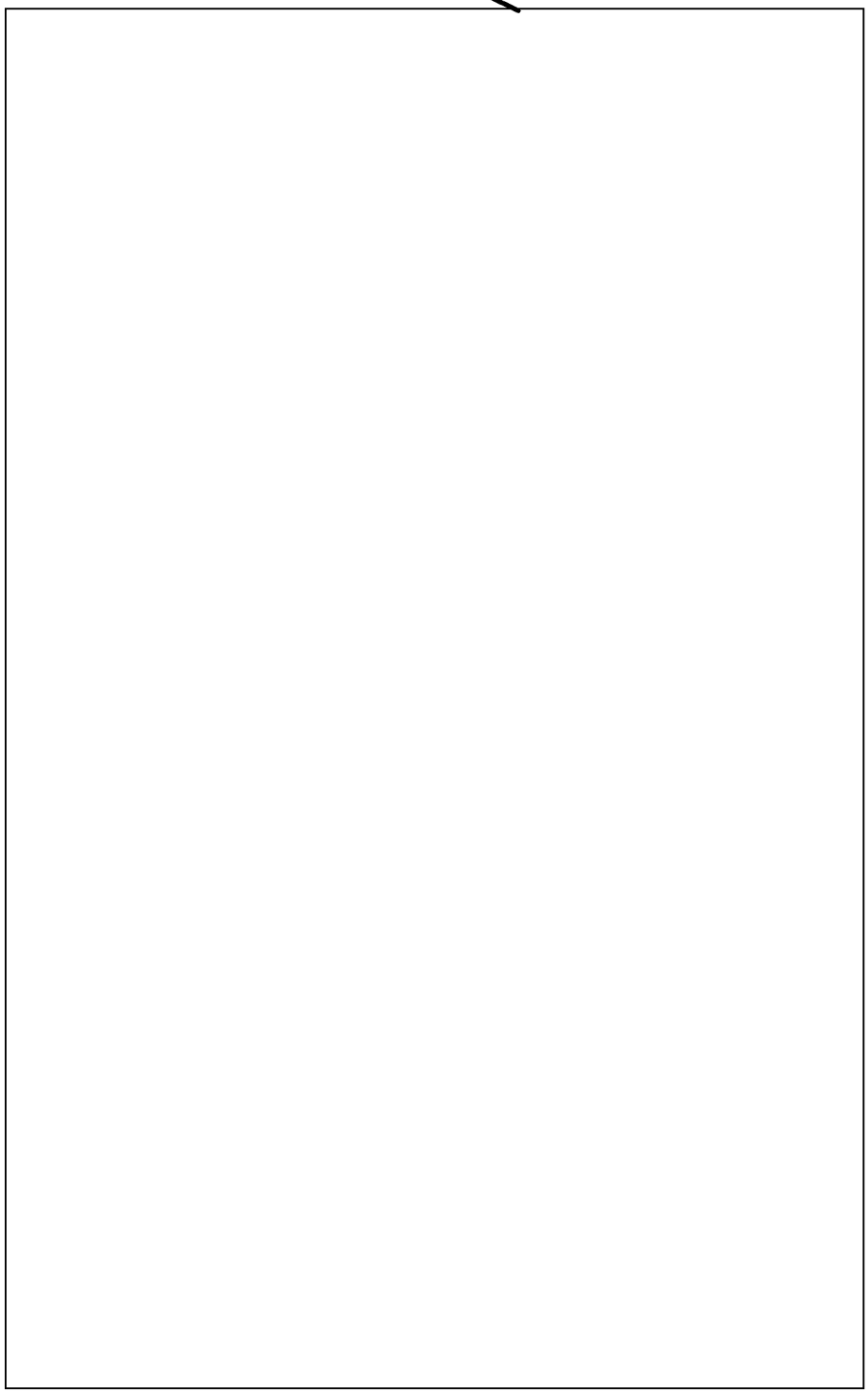
At this point the American State Department got wind of the scheme and vetoed any further US role in the proceedings. Without the Americans as intermediaries, the arrangements crumbled. In the embittered views of both Angleton and Critchfield, an opportunity of possibly historic proportions had been allowed to slip away.[36]

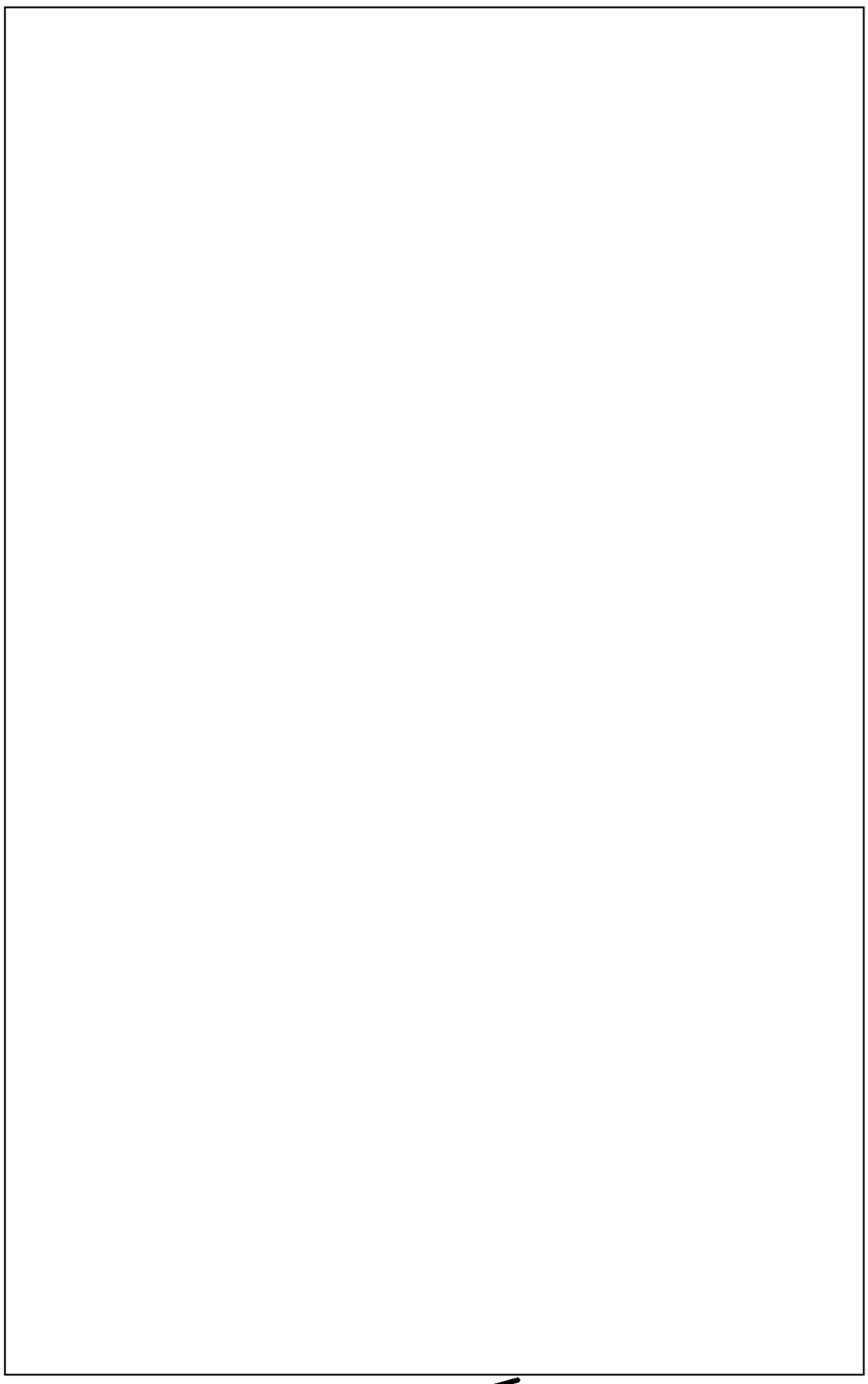
[redacted]

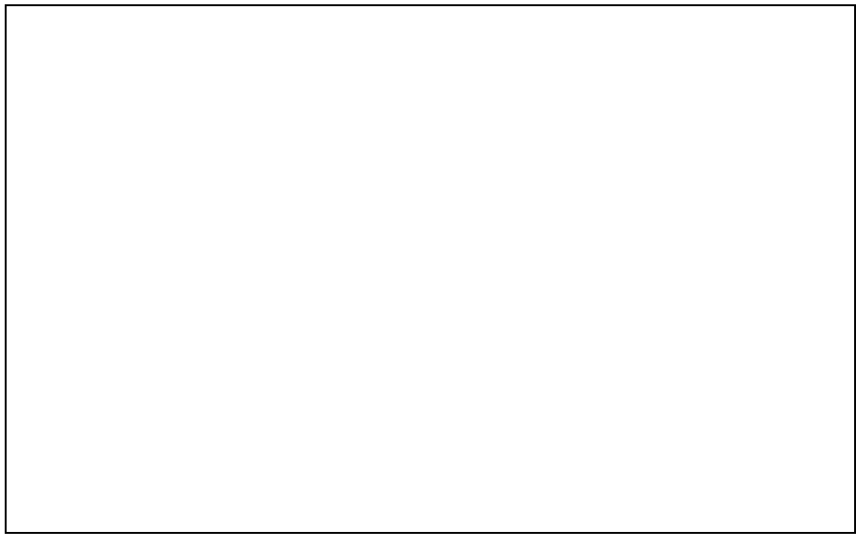












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Chapter 7

Relations With Congress

Robert M. Hathaway

A fundamental tension suffuses the relationship between Congress and the CIA. The members of the legislative branch, acting in their oversight capacity, are frequently cast in the role of critic or prying interloper. Yet, in Richard Helms's tenure as Director of Central Intelligence the ability to perform this supervisory function was heavily constrained by the extent of the Agency's willingness to furnish the necessary information. In fact, Congress and the CIA each provides services the other needs to carry out its responsibilities adequately. Congress needs intelligence from CIA when it deals with national security issues, while CIA must depend on Congress for statutes and funds to establish and maintain it, as well as for oversight to protect it from damaging exposure and political debate.

For a long time the relationship between Congress and CIA has been considerably richer and more complicated than the common image of overseer to ward suggests. In fact, to focus only on this facet of Congressional-Agency ties distorts the dynamics of the relationship during the Richard Helms years. Through Congressional briefings and the dissemination of its intelligence, the CIA enhanced defense and foreign policy debates to a degree not even hinted at by the usual connotations of oversight. Partnership as much as suspicion characterized the relationship linking Langley and Capitol Hill between 1966 and 1973.

The chronicler of CIA-Congressional ties confronts a dilemma in that the routine, orderly functioning of government seldom appears noteworthy. Only when controversy rages, when things fail to go according to plan, do outsiders take notice. As a consequence, any account of Congressional-Agency relations is bound to accent the frictions, the negative, the harsh words. To remember that behind these disputes often lies a mutuality of outlook and interests requires an act of will from both historian and reader.

Yet the years immediately following Richard Helms's service as Director constitute the nadir of a Congressional-Agency relationship that now extends well over 40 years. The 1973-76 period saw a sustained assault from Capitol Hill on the assumptions, purposes, and practices that had guided CIA since its inception. Helms himself faced prolonged legal difficulties after retiring from the Agency, problems which arose from allegations that he had deliberately misled the Congress about events that occurred while he was DCI. These unpleasant facts jar discordantly with the notion of partnership.

To the tension inherent in Congressional-Agency relations must be added the contradiction between the Richard Helms widely acclaimed by the Congressmen who supervised CIA affairs; and the Helms severely—at times unmercifully—castigated for allowing his organization to be corrupted for purposes contrary to legislative desires.

Nor is this all, for beneath these crosscurrents more fundamental forces were dramatically altering the American political process in ways that would reshape the place intelligence held in American life. An unpopular war increasingly focused a new skepticism on the assumptions that had undergirded the nation's foreign policies for two decades and destroyed what had been a remarkable national foreign policy consensus. At the same time, the American people experienced a profound loss of confidence in their government. Lyndon Johnson's "credibility gap" and the open distrust that Richard Nixon evoked from large segments of the populace were both symptomatic of and contributory to this heightened sense of disillusionment.

CIA, as an instrument of government, suffered from this general collapse of faith in the country's governing processes. Moreover, as a secret organization in a society prizing open access to the levers of power, CIA was doubly vulnerable to the suspicions of a citizenry newly awakened to the dangers of unchecked power. The inflated passions of the era made CIA an appealing target for many groups and individuals who came to see the Agency as emblematic of the varied ills they sought to rectify.

Under these circumstances, Richard Helms increasingly found himself, especially in his final years as DCI, defending his organization from all manner of Congressional criticism—some thoughtful and measured, some based more on fantasy than fact. Seldom were Helms's own capabilities or integrity questioned. Indeed, the persistent respect accorded Helms during his tenure as DCI constituted one of the more remarkable aspects of the growing propensity on Capitol Hill to challenge the Agency. Fortified by his continuing good repute, Helms generally succeeded in parrying Congressional assaults on CIA. In retrospect we can see that his successes

were largely illusory, papering over rather than reconciling the contradictions inherent in a free society's reliance on a secret intelligence organization. Even as Richard Helms left the Agency in early 1973 for a new diplomatic career, the passions of the era were sweeping CIA toward greater turmoil.

Confirmation and the McCarthy Resolution, 1966

The Senate that was asked in June 1966 to confirm Richard Helms as the new DCI was ensnared in a controversy more heated than any concerning the CIA of the preceding 10 years. Arguing that the Agency played an important role in making American foreign policy, Senator Eugene McCarthy (D-MN) had introduced a resolution in early 1966 that, after various parliamentary modifications, would have added three members of the Foreign Relations Committee to the existing CIA oversight subcommittees.[1]

In May, Senator J. William Fulbright's Foreign Relations Committee endorsed the proposal by a 14-to-5 vote. Richard B. Russell (D-GA), chairman of both the Senate Armed Services Committee and its CIA subcommittee, immediately served notice that he resented this implication that his subcommittee had been derelict in supervising the Agency. Russell, whom *Time* magazine called the uncrowned king of the Senate's inner Establishment,[2] proceeded to mobilize his considerable powers, to beat back this challenge.

Helms's nomination arrived at the Senate at precisely this moment. There was press speculation that the President had tapped Helms as Admiral Raborn's successor in order to defuse the dispute that McCarthy's resolution had triggered. The *Washington Star* reported that government insiders regarded Helms's appointment as a "major step" in easing the controversy.[3] Widely respected as a shrewd intelligence professional, Helms possessed the stature to quiet anxiety that the Agency was not adequately supervised. Indirectly referring to the lightly regarded Raborn, Congressman Mendel Rivers pronounced it "entirely fitting" that a career officer should be appointed DCI. House Minority Leader Gerald Ford spoke for the opposition party in commending the President for placing direction of the CIA in such capable hands.[4]

[1]These were the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Central Intelligence and an untitled (until 1969) Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on CIA oversight.
[2]*Time*, 22 July 1966, p. 21.
[3]*Washington Star*, 23 June 1966, A5.
[4]*Congressional Record*, Vol. 112: 14245, 14247.

Senate Historical Office

Senator Richard Russell

Helms breezed through his confirmation hearings before Russell's Armed Services Committee. An Agency record noted that the Senators present were "most helpful" in posing questions that allowed Helms to address the matters then agitating Congress. Insisting that CIA had no policymaking role within the government, Helms denied that the Agency had ever attempted to influence decisions. The CIA, he assured his audience, merely provided decisionmakers with the intelligence they required

for wise choices. After unanimously approving Helms's nomination, the committee went into executive session for a general briefing on the world situation, particularly the war in Southeast Asia. In a revealing digression, Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI) asked Helms about the size of the Agency's budget. When Russell interrupted to say that this touched on matters better left to the CIA Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, Inouye immediately withdrew his question.[5] Helms's unanimous confirmation by the full Senate a few days later effectively derailed McCarthy's efforts to expand Senate oversight, and the proposal died in committee.

Soon afterwards, George Cary of the Legislative Liaison Division of the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) reported a conversation that nicely illustrates several facets of the Agency's relationship with Congress as Richard Helms assumed command. William Woodruff, a senior staffer on the Senate Appropriations Committee, admitted to Cary that the Senate had somewhat neglected the intelligence community, adding that Russell had only recently directed him to become more active in this area. Cary's memorandum further observed: "We agreed that regardless of the reasons, this new emphasis on the part of the [CIA] subcommittee members on their responsibilities concerning the Agency was a healthy one." Cary reminded Woodruff that, "as he knew, we welcomed a thorough budget review, feeling that it was in the best interests of both the Agency and the Subcommittee to have it better informed on the Agency's programs and activities." Acknowledging this, Woodruff observed that he found it far easier to get budgetary information from the CIA than from most other executive departments and agencies.[6]

Woodruff's comments on the Senate's neglect of the intelligence community are evidence of the independence CIA had enjoyed for nearly two decades. While this freedom from restraint reflected Congressional confidence in CIA's leadership, product, and purpose, this largely uncritical confidence also owed a good deal to the prevailing foreign policy consensus of these years. The Congress, like the rest of the nation, was gripped by a set of Cold War assumptions that hardly questioned the need for an active and relatively unsupervised central intelligence organization. Small CIA subcommittees of the Appropriations and Armed Services Committees in each House nominally carried out legislative oversight of the CIA, but in an atmosphere of solicitude and camaraderie. Secure in the public's confidence and exempt from standard disclosure and accounting regulations, the CIA remained remarkably free from the checks the legislative branch normally places on operations of the executive.

[5]*OLC Journal*, 23 June 1966, Office of Legislative Counsel Records; Lawrence Houston, General Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 23 June 1966, Office of General Counsel Records.
[6]George L. Cary, Jr., Legislative Liaison Division, Office of General Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 25 July 1966, Office of General Counsel Records.

Senior Congressmen and Senators holding the powerful chairmanships and serving on the Agency oversight subcommittees not only acquiesced in this unique autonomy, but encouraged it. In March 1966, Deputy General Counsel John Warner, who supervised the Agency's day-to-day dealings with Congress, produced a revealing memorandum about this situation. The unwillingness of CIA's Senate subcommittees to hold more regular meetings left the Agency extremely vulnerable, Warner wrote. Over the past eight years, he continued, fewer than four briefings a year had been called. Often only four Senators participated in these meetings, since the two Senate CIA subcommittees met jointly and had an overlapping membership. Moreover, there had not been a full-fledged budget presentation to these two Senate subcommittees in 10 years. "A fair estimate would be that the Subcommittee has heard the Agency on budget matters for no more than an average of one hour each year. In a majority of the years there has been *no* discussion of the budget by the Agency with the Subcommittee." Warner concluded that his memorandum was too sensitive for general circulation. "If this information were available to critics of the current Subcommittee system," he cautioned, no doubt thinking of McCarthy, Fulbright, and their supporters on the Foreign Relations Committee, "obviously it would provide them with strong ammunition."[7] On 6 April, Warner and Helms met to discuss the implications of this information, but agreed to take no further steps at the moment. Less than three months later, Helms replaced Raborn as Director.

Warner's memorandum, like Cary's record of his conversation with Woodruff, makes it clear that the Agency stood ready to provide its oversight subcommittees with a frank accounting of its activities. Indeed, in recent years CIA had usually initiated briefings for its Senate subcommittees. To the degree that Congressional supervision of CIA was lacking, this reflected the deliberate choice of the oversight subcommittees, rather than any reluctance on the Agency's part. Helms's predecessors, and Helms himself following his confirmation, consistently maintained that Congress was entitled to know as much about Agency affairs as the members thought necessary to carry out their responsibilities.

Having said this, however, successive Directors invariably added a single qualification that, in effect, withdrew much of what they had seemingly granted: CIA could provide only that intelligence which lay within the requesting committee's jurisdiction. Given the DCI's legal obligation to protect Agency sources and methods, this caveat hardly appeared unreasonable, but its impact was sweeping. Except for the four oversight subcommittees, most members and committees of Congress were severely limited in the amount and types of intelligence they could get from CIA. Substantive information might be passed on; operational or organizational

[7]John S. Warner, Legislative Counsel, Memorandum for Lawrence K. White, Executive Director–Comptroller, 28 March 1966, Office of Legislative Counsel Records.

information, virtually never.

There was often no clear agreement about precisely what lay within the jurisdictions of specific committees. Appeals to Senator Russell invariably elicited an extremely narrow definition of what information CIA should convey to these other committees. Frustration at being cut out in this fashion had prompted McCarthy's resolution in 1966. When questioned on these matters, DCIs before Helms had consistently replied that jurisdiction was an issue for Congressional decision, and that they would be happy to report to any committee as Congress directed.

Since these restrictive practices usually met with acceptance or only perfunctory protest, Richard Helms inherited a relationship with Congress that was on the whole stable and mutually satisfactory. Nonetheless, McCarthy's challenge in 1966 to the Congressional old guard's monopoly on access to CIA was a harbinger of problems that would within a few years completely alter CIA's relaxed ties to the Hill. Russell's easy triumph over McCarthy—which CIA supporters acclaimed at the time—may have been unfortunate, for it helped Agency backers complacently ignore the underlying currents that were sweeping CIA toward disaster.

Senator Russell's Oversight

Within weeks of assuming the directorship, Helms got himself into a situation that for a brief moment threatened to overturn the equanimity marking Congressional-Agency ties. On 18 July 1966 an editorial in the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* had applauded the Senate's decision to bury the McCarthy resolution. In passing, it had also characterized Fulbright as "crafty," a description to which the Senator and many of his friends objected. Helms, as part of the Agency's program to foster healthy relations with the press, wrote a letter to the editors praising their stand on the McCarthy proposal. But when the paper published his letter on 27 July, one could interpret Helms's comments as endorsing the entire editorial, including its characterization of Fulbright. The Senate reacted indignantly, and Fulbright spoke of the need to "teach the new Director some proper conduct." John Stennis, a staunch Agency supporter, noted that he "exceedingly" regretted Helms's letter and called upon the DCI to offer Fulbright full apologies. Majority Leader Mike Mansfield pronounced himself "more than a little surprised that the 'silent service' has seen fit to write to the newspaper. . . . I think this is a matter which must be brought to the attention of Mr. Helms, so that this will not become a habit with him."[8]

Mansfield need not have feared that. The surprised DCI called an immediate meeting of his chief subordinates, who counseled Helms to admit his mistake promptly and apologize to the Senator. The DCI did exactly

[8] *Congressional Record*, Vol. 112: 17463, 17465.

that, telephoning not only Fulbright but also Mansfield, Stennis, and other ranking Senators of both political parties. On 29 July he appeared before Fulbright's committee to offer further mea culpas. Finally, he called on Russell in order, as Helms later put it, "to explain myself to him and to send my apologies for . . . any embarrassment I might have caused him." Helms's apology and ready admission of error placated Senators who were not accustomed to hearing from the Director of Central Intelligence. The storm dissipated as quickly as it had arisen. Within days the entire affair was forgotten, except perhaps by the DCI, who seems to have taken to heart the advice proffered by North Carolina Senator Sam Ervin: "I hope that out of this matter will come an appreciation by the Director of the CIA of the great truth that men rarely regret saying too little."[9]

Recollection of his narrow escape undoubtedly lay behind Helms's decision a few months later to remove the legislative liaison function from the Office of the General Counsel, where it had usually resided since the Agency's founding, and to establish an independent Office of Legislative Counsel (OLC) as a separate component in the Director's Office.[10] In one sense, the DCI's action simply acknowledged the importance Congressional relations had assumed over the years. By the mid-1960s, supervising these ties had become a full-time job, and John Warner, who served as both Deputy General Counsel and Legislative Counsel, was simply spread too thin.

But the DCI's move accomplished something else as well. By eliminating the General Counsel from the chain of command, Helms brought legislative matters more directly under his own purview. This reflected his conviction that Congressional relations were one of the DCI's personal responsibilities, since they often required close judgment calls that could have a major bearing on the Agency's well-being. For similar reasons, Helms instructed Warner, who left his position as Deputy General Counsel to head the new OLC, to attend the DCI's staff meetings each morning. Including Warner in the small number of regular morning meeting participants was an unmistakable sign of how important Richard Helms considered relations with Congress. It may be that this represented a legacy of the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* fiasco. A small matter in itself, the experience nonetheless made a lasting impression on Helms and his associates, judging from its prominence in their recollections years later.

Helms demonstrated the importance he assigned Congressional relations in other ways as well. For instance, he insisted on appearing himself whenever possible before Congressional committees requesting an Agency briefing, even if he did little more than sit to one side while one of his specialists testified on a technical matter. In Helms's mind his personal participation accomplished two purposes. First, it massaged political egos by

[9]Richard M. Helms, interview by R. Jack Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 3 June 1982 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 3 June 1982); *Congressional Record*, Vol. 112: 17466.

[10]HN 1-64, dated 1 November 1966, announced the change, effective 15 November 1966.

recognizing that most Congressmen expected the head of an agency or department to personally cater to them. Second, in this way the DCI could monitor the flow of information to the Hill, a task he considered essential for maintaining control over the Agency's most valuable commodity.

At times Helms worried that the current subcommittee system, which excluded most Congressmen from substantive contacts with the Agency, might eventually undermine the generally favorable relationship with the Hill that Raborn had bequeathed him. On one occasion the DCI went to Senator Russell and suggested that, as a preventive measure, the Agency seek out contacts with a wider spectrum of the Senate. Russell's reaction caught the Director by surprise. "He looked me right in the eye and his eye got a little bit glinty," Helms remembers. "He said, 'If you feel any necessity to go around and talk to other Senators about the Agency's business I certainly can't stop you, Mr. Director. But I'll tell you this, I will withdraw my hand and my support from your affairs."[11]

Russell's fierce opposition to what in retrospect appears a sound proposal reflected his conviction that Agency affairs were too important and too sensitive to risk divulging to more than a handful of his most discreet Senatorial colleagues. Conservative and courtly, a lifelong bachelor with somewhat ascetic tastes, a hard-working master of legislative detail, the wielder of extraordinary power in a power-conscious town—Richard Brevard Russell was by the mid-1960s universally recognized as the CIA's special guardian in the Congress. The Georgia lawmaker viewed the CIA as an agency one had to take with a certain degree of trust, even if this meant it thereby escaped the thorough scrutiny normally accorded agencies of the executive branch. Congressional supervision was to be minimal; access to CIA secrets, closely guarded. Reflecting this caution, Russell never called as many briefings of the combined Senate oversight subcommittees as Agency officers would have preferred. Helms "always manifested a willingness, an eagerness really, to come as often and maybe more often than the committee scheduled [his] appearances," William Darden, one of Russell's senior aides, has remembered. But the Senator never wanted to go into administrative details; he "didn't see himself as an auditor."[12] Nor was he likely to permit others to assume this role. CIA would one day find that this paternalism carried liabilities as well as advantages.

Of course, much of Russell's reluctance to ride herd on CIA arose from his confidence in Helms. The Senator and the DCI appear to have developed an understanding based on mutual trust and respect. It was perhaps a businesslike relationship rather than a warm one, neither man possessing a particularly effusive personality. Darden has testified that, although

[11]Helms interview, 3 June 1982.
[12]William Darden, interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 27 October 1983 (hereafter cited as Darden interview, 27 October 1983) (SECRET).

Russell generally kept executive branch officials at arm's length, the Senator admired and liked Helms. For his part, Helms found Russell "an extraordinary fellow. . . . [O]f all the Congressmen and Senators I dealt with over the years, by all odds the most impressive was Senator Richard Russell. He was, as they say in the newspapers, a giant in the Senate." Many years later, the retired DCI would recall a specific bit of advice Russell had given him. "Mr. Director," he relates the Senator saying, "I think that you've got to be very careful not to get into affairs that don't concern you. More people have had real trouble in this town by getting involved in things that really aren't their business than for any other single reason that I know of." Remembering the incident, Helms adds: "I thought it was the best piece of advice I ever had and I haven't forgotten it."[13]

Again and again Russell mobilized his immense power on Capitol Hill to shield CIA from inquiring eyes—including those of his Senatorial colleagues. On one occasion Wisconsin Senator William Proxmire asked Helms to testify on the Soviet economy before the joint Economic Committee, which Proxmire chaired. Helms consulted Russell about the request and received instructions to return to Proxmire and "say you've discussed this with me and that I would prefer you didn't do it." And that, Helms relates, "was the end of the matter. When I told Senator Proxmire this he just sort of waved his hands and that was the end of the discussion."[14] On another occasion, Helms was disturbed by two very senior Senators' public comments about American satellite capabilities. Rather than approach the offending legislators himself, the DCI asked Russell to take up the matter with them. A single word from the Georgian, Helms realized, would carry far more weight than the most earnest remonstrances from a Director of Central Intelligence.

Helms valued his relationship with the powerful Georgian and worked diligently to maintain the trust Russell reposed in the Agency. For instance, he took great care to see that CIA maintained its credibility as an independent organization without a policymaking role. For the same reasons he jealously guarded his reputation on Capitol Hill for unvarnished honesty. Above all else, he has said, "I leveled with the Congress. I believed that they had a right to have a straight story." Observers on the Hill appreciated this attitude and came to rely on the DCI for an impartial rendering of the facts. From his vantage point within the Senate Armed Services Committee, Darden remembers that Helms "did a good job of avoiding the appearance of trying to influence Congressional decisions on whether something should or shouldn't be done and giving me the appearance at least of just saying 'here is the information we have; we're not trying to tell you what that should lead you to do.'" In a 1969 conversation

[13] *Ibid.*; Helms interview, 3 June 1982. Sam Ervin, it will be recalled, said essentially the same thing during the furor kicked up by the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat* letter.
[14] Helms interview, 3 June 1982.

with an Agency officer Senator Stuart Symington made this same point by praising Helms's practice of "sticking to the facts in briefings and not indulging in speculation."[15]

Vietnam was something of a touchstone in this respect. As the war increasingly came to divide the nation, the DCI recognized the dangers of appearing to champion a particular viewpoint. It became obvious to Helms "that, if intelligence was to have any standing in the Congress, it had to have the support, as intelligence, of both sides of the aisle. And I didn't know any way to do this except to make the reports as objective and my testimony as objective as I was able to do."[16] Although the DCI remembers that this stance did not always endear him to the White House, testimony from antiwar Senators such as William Fulbright and Albert Gore that Helms was the only member of the administration who gave them an honest picture of conditions in Vietnam rebutted charges that CIA had become captive to the prevailing policies. Representative George Mahon spoke for many of his colleagues when he told Helms upon the DCI's retirement that "I must say I have not encountered a man in government who in my judgment has been more objective, more fiercely nonpartisan, more absolutely inclined to be perfectly frank with the Congress than you have been. You have just called it as you have seen it, and we have complete and utter confidence in you."[17]

Of course, the candor for which Helms frequently received plaudits possessed strict limits, reflecting both the wishes of the White House and Helms's own predilections and background in the Directorate of Plans (DDP). Nixon, for instance, in June 1969 directed that CIA write no letters to the Hill on substantive matters. Furthermore, oral briefings were to be as "unspecific" as possible.[18] But these instructions merely reinforced Helms's own instincts. John Warner has spoken of a certain conflict within the DCI, between his training and experience in DDP, where security and secrecy amounted at times to an obsession, and his realization that satisfactory ties to Congress depended upon mutual trust and a willingness to be candid with individuals outside the intelligence profession. Helms "was in constant tug with himself," Warner has said.[19]

[15]Richard M. Helms, interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 4 November 1983 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 4 November 1983); Darden interview, 27 October 1983; John M. Maury, Jr., Legislative Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 2 May 1969, Office of Legislative Counsel Records.
[16]Richard M. Helms, interview by R. Jack Smith, tape recording, Washington, DC, 14 April 1983 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 14 April 1983).
[17]Representative Mahon quoted in John M. Maury, "CIA and the Congress," *Studies in Intelligence* 18 (summer 1974): 10.
[18]John M. Maury, Jr., Legislative Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 24 June 1969, Office of Legislative Counsel Records.
[19]John S. Warner, interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 22 August 1983 (hereafter cited as Warner interview, 22 August 1983).

As a consequence, a noticeable reserve characterized Helms's dealings with the Hill. The DCI "felt he should provide the Congress only what was absolutely necessary," OLC staff member George Cary recalls. "[H]e did not go up gratuitously and say, 'Hey, you ought to know about so-and-so.'" Helms adopted a somewhat standoffish approach to most Congressmen, Cary continues. He "didn't get buddy-buddy, if you will, with the run-of-the-mill members of Congress. Some people kind of work the Congress, as we say, regardless of who it is. Helms didn't play that game. I . . . characterize Helms as a kind of a 'hardliner.' I think that's Helms's personality." Agency officer Clifton R. Strathern similarly recalls that, in the DCI's briefings, Helms thought that Congressmen and Senators should be given "everything they really should have known but nothing that was absolutely irrelevant to what they needed to know." Significantly, the DCI, not his Congressional audience, made this distinction.[20]

At times this circumscribed approach bothered subordinates preoccupied with precision. On one occasion, in briefing a Congressional committee on the Agency's activities in Laos, Helms insisted on calling all the irregular forces "Meos," despite objections from his experts that the Meos were only one of several Montagnard tribal groups working with the CIA. Getting caught up in technicalities would only confuse his listeners, the DCI ruled. This "wasn't a question of dissembling or being less than honest with Congress," Strathern later explained. "It was just the fact that [listing each tribe separately] was unimportant to the purpose of the testimony."[21] In stripping issues to their essentials, in tailoring his intelligence to his audience, the DCI kept a tight rein on the information flow. In Richard Helms, candor and independence coexisted more or less comfortably with discretion and the intelligence professional's ingrained caution.

Strathern's story about the Meos also suggests a certain disdain Helms may have felt toward legislators whose expertise did not match their responsibilities. Advice he offered William Colby in 1970 illustrates this point. Colby was to testify on the situation in Vietnam before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and before Colby returned from Saigon for the hearings Helms cabled him advice about his opening statement. "Your text will have to be aimed at a pretty low level of knowledge and couched in language which is pretty simple and straightforward. Otherwise it is going to go right over the heads of most of the Senators in the room," the DCI observed. "The names and initials which we all throw around with great energy are totally unknown to these men, some of whom do not listen very carefully even under the best of circumstances." Helms's concluding

[20]George L. Cary, interview by Robert M. Hathaway, tape recording, Washington, DC, 30 September 1983 (hereafter cited as Cary interview, 30 September 1983); Strathern interview, 7 April 1983.
[21]Strathern interview, 7 April 1983.

advice: "define terms, clarify semantics, and generally keep the briefing as simple as possible."[22] This was doubtless sound counsel, but perhaps not the advice of one who viewed the legislators as genuine partners.

For his part, Helms expected certain things from the Congress. In the first place, he looked to the chairmen of the committees he briefed to take the lead in heading off sensitive questions, especially inquiries pertaining to Agency sources. Without the active cooperation of these senior legislators, he has noted, "you get nowhere."[23] Secondly, he expected the two Houses to abide by their own rules and refrain from insisting that he divulge confidential information except in the proper forum—that is, before the four oversight subcommittees. In the absence of such safeguards, he feared, the DCI would never retain secure control of the intelligence it was his duty to protect.

In Helms's estimation, the key to a smoothly functioning relationship between CIA and the Congress "is that confidentiality be observed." He was adamant on this score. "[I]f the Director cannot be sure of confidentiality, then it's going to be very difficult for him to play the proper role which they expect of him, which is to confide in them." Congress's obligation to keep secrets was the reverse side of the DCI's obligation to be forthright with the legislators. During the Helms years, Agency officers agreed. members of the Congress generally lived up to this responsibility. "I never had any difficulties with leaks," Helms recollects. "Therefore, I felt safe in sharing with them confidences and things about highly secret operations which I might not have felt comfortable about under other circumstances."[24]

The system, then, was one of shared responsibilities and mutual obligations. In a very real sense, a concept of partnership linked Congress and the CIA. Each performed services and supplied assistance required by the other. Richard Helms recognized and came to depend upon this symbiotic relationship. Speaking of Congressional ties at their best, Helms observes that from time to time a Director "would like to be able to hold hands with some Senators and Congressmen on something that is dicey and tricky and might fail."[25] On another occasion, he amplified this idea:

> [D]espite all those who say, "well, you shouldn't talk about secret matters with Congressional committees" and all the pomposity that follows this, in our kind of democracy a Director of Central Intelligence *does* need guidance from time to time from the people in the Congress as to how far he may go in certain kinds of activity. At least he would like to have some advice. When this is not available through regular hearings, it makes it slightly

[22]Richard M. Helms, Director of Central Intelligence, EYES ONLY cable to William Colby. Director of Civil Operations and Rural Development Support, Saigon, 4 February 1970.
[23]Helms interview, 4 November 1983.
[24]*Ibid.*
[25]*Ibid.*

> difficult for him. In fact, it makes it very lonely indeed. Not that I was unwilling to take on the onus of the responsibility or any of the rest of it. It was simply that I thought that a better system of relationships between the Agency and the Congress should have been arranged.[26]

What Helms could not know as he moved into the Director's suite in 1966 was that the collaborative relationship he envisioned would soon be replaced by one much more adversarial in nature. For this development Richard Helms bore some responsibility; the Congress—ironically including even some supporters of the CIA—a somewhat larger share; and the changing circumstances of America a still larger portion. In 1966, CIA basked in the final days of the simple, even cozy, relationship with Congress that had been the norm for two decades. It was, however, about to be rudely swept aside by a rising tide of suspicion and disillusion.

The *Ramparts* Affair, 1967

A sudden breach of Agency security put Helms's views on the nature of CIA-Congressional ties to the test in early 1967. During the second week of February, Agency officers learned that the leftwing monthly *Ramparts* would shortly publish an article documenting CIA financial links with a number of private American organizations, most notably the National Student Association. The story broke publicly on 14 February amid lurid advertisements proclaiming a "case study in the corruption of youthful idealism." The article itself discussed CIA funding practices at length and named many recipients of Agency monies in addition to the National Student Association.[27] Public reaction was instantaneously and overwhelmingly negative toward CIA. Eight Democratic Congressmen wrote President Johnson to call for an immediate investigation "at the highest level" and charged that the student association subsidy "represents an unconscionable extension of power by an agency of government over institutions outside its jurisdiction." Disclosure of the covert financial arrangements, they added, "leads us and many others here and abroad to believe that the CIA can be as much a threat to American as to foreign democratic institutions."[28]

Forewarned of the impending expose, Helms and other Agency officers briefed key Members of Congress well in advance of the revelations in the hope of mitigating some of the anticipated damage. Beginning the day after public disclosure of the story, Helms traveled to Capitol Hill

[26]Helms interview, 3 June 1982.
[27]Sol Stern, "NSA and the CIA," *Ramparts* V (March 1967): 29-39. The quotation is from an ad in *The New York Times*, 14 February 1967, L31.
[28]*The Washington Post*, 15 February 1967, A1, A4.

[An Editorial Announcement]

In its March issue, Ramparts magazine will document how the CIA has infiltrated and subverted the world of American student leaders, over the past fifteen years.

It has used students to spy; it has used students to pressure international student organizations into taking Cold War positions; and it has interfered, in a most shocking manner, in the internal workings of the nation's largest and oldest student organization.*

The 10,000 word account of the operations of the CIA within America's largest student organization is a case study in the corruption of youthly idealism. It is also a singularly disquieting indication of the extent to which the government's secret intelligence apparatus wormed its way into American institutions.

The story in the March Ramparts also presents an amazing account of how the CIA bends so-called independent foundations to its clandestine financial purposes, using them as conduits for espionage money. Names are named and dollar amounts cited.

It is, additionally, the poignant story of the recent attempts by student leaders to throw off their financial shackles to the CIA, and of the highly-placed liberals in the government who tried—and failed—to help them.

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When you read this extraordinary article, you will feel that the CIA owes the youth of this country an apology.

The demand for the March Ramparts is expected to be unusually heavy, so you may be well advised to ask your newsdealer to reserve your copy now. If you wish, you may insure receiving the March issue on time by entering a subscription at the special introductory rates listed below. Each orders will receive, free, a copy of the February Ramparts on Robert Kennedy.

Also in the March Ramparts: A social history and political evaluation of the Hippies, America's new gypsies (with 11 pages of color photographs); H. Stuart Hughes on Jean Paul Sartre; The unusually hard times of Maine's Passamaquoddy Indians; "The Death of A President" – the story behind the firing of Clark Kerr; William Appleman Williams on Senator Fulbright; Novelist Stephen Schneck on the Hell's Angels; Activist Tom Hayden on the Viet Cong.

[Feature]

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on four occasions to talk with Congressional groups, including the oversight subcommittees. In each case he emphasized that none of the programs CIA had financed involved domestic matters. Agency money had been used solely for international operations to counter Communist front organizations. No subversion or espionage, he insisted, had been conducted through these activities. Typical of his statements was his explanation to members of the House Appropriations Committee on 15 February. He did not necessarily believe that the CIA should be subsidizing these types of organizations, Helms averred, but some group or agency should. "[T]here is nobody in the United States Government who has the money to take care of this kind of thing, and unless some device is found for doing it, it ends up being done by an organization like the CIA." This then exposed the Agency to charges of subverting American youth, the DCI continued, anger rising. "We have done no such thing. We simply turned money over to them to use for travel funds and things of this kind and made no effort whatever to guide that money nor to tell them how they should run their organization. Our hands are totally clean in this."[29]

Helms's vigorous defense of CIA practices gradually drew supporters to the Agency's side. The CIA subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee issued a press release commending the Agency and pointedly stating that CIA would have been derelict in its duty had it not undertaken such clandestine operations. "Espionage was not involved—the survival of freedom was," Chairman Mendel Rivers and ranking minority member William Bates jointly declared.[30] GOP Senate leader Everett Dirksen complained that the "Roman holiday" of disclosures jeopardized the nation's capacity to obtain needed intelligence, while Representative Samuel Stratton chastised his Congressional colleagues for insisting on a Pollyanna stance for the United States in a world "all too often peopled by cutthroats and dirty players." Especially influential was Senator Robert Kennedy's statement that the CIA should not be forced to "take the rap" for programs approved by high officials in three administrations.[31]

Indeed, after the initial flurry of critical remarks, the preponderance of Congressional comment voiced approval that the Agency conducted the types of activities detailed in *Ramparts*. A number of Congressmen and Senators with whom CIA had had no previous dealings made floor statements in support of the Agency. By the end of the year, Legislative

[29]Transcript of DCI Briefing, Defense and Military Construction Subcommittees, Appropriations Committee, House of Representatives, 15 February 1967. Also see John S. Warner, Legislative Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 17 February 1967, Office of Legislative Counsel Records.

[30]*The Washington Post*, 18 February 1967, A1.

[31]Senator Everett Dirksen's quote in *The Washington Post*, 25 February 1967, A4; Representative Samuel Stratton's quote in Anthony Marc Lewis, "The 1967 Crisis in Covert Action Operations: The *Ramparts* Exposures," CSHP 196 (1970), 45; Senator Robert Kennedy's quote in *The New York Times*, 22 February 1967, 17. Kennedy's statement came in part from background information the Senator had requested from Helms.

Counsel Warner felt sufficiently sanguine about the entire episode to conclude his annual report for 1967 by noting that the expose had gained CIA a number of new supporters who more than offset Congressional critics.

For the moment another danger seemed to have been averted. From a longer viewpoint, however, we can now see the *Ramparts* affair as one of the first in a series of increasingly serious challenges to the way CIA had conducted its business for two decades. Sharp questions had been raised about the CIA's legislative authority for engaging in certain activities. The episode prompted renewed grumbling that Congress was not adequately informed of Agency activities and suggestions that the creation of a joint oversight committee might be considered again. Concerned lawmakers again raised the old question of the place a secret intelligence organization should occupy in an open society. Perhaps most important, the wraps had been taken off some Agency activities, and those who searched for more revelations found both precedent and justification in the events of February 1967. As Helms observed years later, "things rather settled down again but never to be precisely the same."[32]

New Strains on the System

Things were never the same, for by 1967 the entire American national security process was being shaken by fundamental challenges. The second half of the 1960s witnessed the collapse of the consensus that had underwritten America's Cold War policies for two decades. The assumptions that had dominated foreign policy debates since the end of World War II were called into question by a number of major changes in world politics: America's rapprochement with the Soviet Union, incontrovertible evidence of a far-reaching split in Sino-Soviet relations, many Americans' growing dissatisfaction with the results of 20 years of interventionism, and—most of all—sharply rising domestic opposition to the war in Vietnam. Increasingly bitter as the decade unfolded, this new skepticism in the country frequently pitted Congress against the White House, and by the end of the Johnson presidency ties between the two branches of government had become severely strained. The substitution of Richard Nixon for Johnson in January 1969 only exacerbated matters; by 1970 relations between the President and Congress were frostier than at any time in a generation. This conflict placed CIA in a tenuous position, for it was uniquely vulnerable to Congressional ire, both as an institution closely associated with America's Cold War policies, and as an executive branch agency operating in important respects beyond legislative control.

[32]Helms interview, 3 June 1982.

As the war in Indochina ground on with no end in sight, Senator Fulbright assumed leadership of those forces in the Congress that called for a greater voice in overseeing Agency operations and—significantly—wider dissemination of the CIA product. Although occasionally invited by Russell to attend the DCI's briefings of the two Senate CIA subcommittees, Fulbright never found these proceedings satisfactory. Repeatedly he attempted to have Helms testify before his Foreign Relations Committee, which the Arkansas Senator had turned into a prominent forum for those questioning American policy in Southeast Asia. Russell, who continued to back the White House on Vietnam, frequently stepped in to block these appearances, ruling that Fulbright's committee was not the proper body to receive such testimony. Helms tried to steer clear of this jurisdictional dispute by professing his willingness to brief anyone the Senate directed. Even so, sniping between the two Senators, and—more fundamentally—between those who supported the war and those who challenged administration policies, provided a constant worry for the Director, who tried hard to keep the Agency from being caught in the crossfire.

Of course, Congressional pressure for Agency information constituted a backhanded compliment to the integrity and usefulness of the CIA product. John M. Maury, who replaced Warner as Legislative Counsel in 1968, observed:

> Our major problems on the Hill may result as much from our successes as our failures: the better we do our job, the greater will be the demand for access to our intelligence product, and the greater will be the Congressional clamor to learn more, and have more to say, about our covert activities.[33]

Even legislators known for their skepticism about CIA's activities voiced high regard for the intelligence it disseminated, recognizing that the Agency could provide them with the information they needed to fulfill their duties responsibly.

Agency-supplied intelligence on Soviet military capabilities, for instance, proved indispensable to the legislators during the politically charged antiballistic missile (ABM) debate in the mid-to-late 1960s. Opponents of the administration's plans to upgrade the ABM system looked to the CIA for information to counter Department of Defense claims that the Soviet Union's SS-9 intercontinental missile gave the Kremlin a first-strike capability. According to one account, Henry Kissinger was furious with Helms for undermining the Pentagon's case; only the intervention of Fulbright and other powerful Capitol Hill figures prevented the national security adviser from pressing for the DCI's dismissal.[34] In September

[33]OLC Annual Report: 1971, Office of Legislative Counsel Records.
[34]Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), pp. 269-270.

1969, Fulbright told John Maury that he hoped he had not put Helms in a difficult position with the administration by engineering the confrontation with the Department of Defense. Fulbright added that, if Helms ever got into trouble with the White House for testifying candidly before Congress, he wanted to be informed in case he could help. A year later, Fulbright publicly praised Helms for his performance during the ABM controversy, declaring that the DCI's testimony before the Foreign Relations Committee had "inspired in us trust and confidence" in the Director's "integrity, honesty, and judgment."[35] These were strong words for one decidedly opposed to the interventionist activities customarily associated with CIA. They also point to a phenomenon characteristic of the Helms years: continuing respect for the DCI even as CIA as an institution came to be viewed with increasing suspicion.

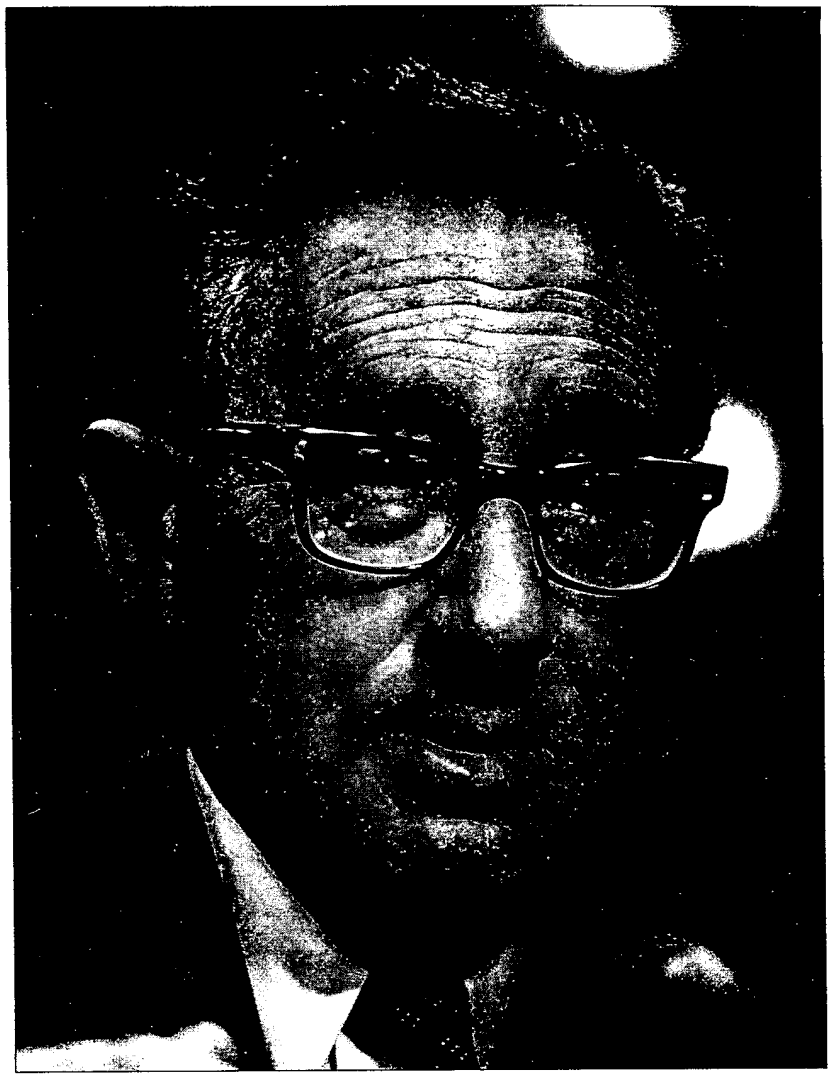
Helms's problems with Kissinger and the Pentagon during the ABM debate reinforced his determination to steer the Agency clear of the political controversies of the day. Many years later, the former DCI would relate another episode illustrating this need to avoid the shoals of partisanship. In 1968, he recalls, Senator John Sherman Cooper wrote to CIA requesting certain information on Soviet and Chinese missile forces. Helms had an answer drafted and, as was his custom, sent it to the Hill for Russell's concurrence before mailing it to Cooper. Helms then continues the story:

> The next thing I knew, I had a frantic telephone call saying Senator Russell wanted to see me right away. So I jumped in the car and went down to the Senate. He came off the floor, and he said, "Don't you ever send a letter like that to Senator Cooper or anybody else." He said, "They'll simply take that letter, come on the floor of the Senate, wave it, and say, 'I've got a letter from the Director of Central Intelligence and it says so-and-so,' and it will adversely affect the debate we're having on the floor right now. As a matter of fact, it may affect the whole budget for the Defense Department. You shouldn't even consider writing letters like that."

"He was really very shirty about it," Helms concludes. "But I learned my lesson that documents of that kind could affect debates, could be very important, and that the Director had to be very careful about whom he wrote to and when he did it and so forth."[36]

National Intelligence Estimates—NIEs—presented a similar problem. As a rule, neither Presidents Johnson nor Nixon wanted these documents circulated on the Hill, and when faced with Congressional requests

[35]John M. Maury, Jr., Legislative Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 9 September 1969, Office of Legislative Counsel Records; *New York Times Magazine*, 18 April 1971, p. 46.
[36]Helms interview, 4 November 1983; Cary's Memorandum for the Record repeats many of these details. George L. Cary, Jr., Office of Legislative Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 24 September 1968. Office of Legislative Counsel Records.



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Henry Kissinger

for NIEs, the DCI almost always replied that he could not release them without the President's permission. In most cases the request would then be withdrawn. "[T]here was a feeling in those years," Helms has said, "that there was no reason to pass these sensitive documents around in the Senate or in the House because they would be used for political purposes."-Helms

always assured his Congressional requesters that, since Agency testimony reflected the contents of the NIEs, their actual distribution was unnecessary.[37]

Vietnam, the ABM system, and differences of opinion over access to NIEs all raised the possibility that Helms might one day find himself squarely in the middle of a conflict between the White House and the Congress. While a member of the executive branch, the CIA by its very nature required a friendly, or at least a reasonably cooperative, Congress. The Agency could ill afford to alienate either the White House or the Hill. Balancing the demands of each was not always easy; occasionally subterfuge was required. At one point, for instance, Helms directed Maury to brief Mendel Rivers on Soviet interest in the Cuban naval base of Cienfuegos, despite instructions from "higher authority" not to do so. Maury urged discretion on the Congressman, remarking that should Kissinger find out about the briefing, "we could really be in trouble." Recalling these times years later, Helms gently observed that neither Johnson nor Nixon had properly appreciated the difficulties their appointees faced in working smoothly with the Hill.[38]

The legislators for their part respected Helms for his steadfast refusal to permit either President to turn CIA into an advocate for current policies. Reactions to a surprise White House announcement in November 1971, detailing changes in the intelligence community and emphasizing the DCI's coordinating responsibilities over the entire community, suggest the extent of their respect. Senior members in the two Houses voiced concern lest this was an attempt to "kick Helms upstairs" and place day-to-day supervision of the Agency in the hands of one more susceptible to White House direction. Their response to what they feared might represent an effort to erode the CIA's independence and objectivity testifies to their admiration for Helms, an esteem that was largely independent of their growing tendency to challenge the organization he headed.

The "Secret War" in Laos

On several occasions the war in Southeast Asia brought the Agency problems that demonstrated the advantages of collaborative ties between CIA and Congress. From almost the beginning of Helms's term as DCI, Agency officers worried about the demands placed upon CIA resources by several large-scale covert operations in Indochina. In mid-1966, the administration ordered a doubling of the Rural Development Cadre (RDC) program, a key element in the campaign to improve social, medical, and

[37]Helms interview, 4 November 1983.
[38]John M. Maury, Jr., Legislative Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 6 October 1970, Office of Legislative Counsel Records; Helms interview, 4 November 1983.

economic conditions in the South Vietnamese countryside. On 21 and 22 September 1966, Helms discussed with the Senate CIA subcommittees the difficulties this expansion would create for the Agency. Russell, observing that these political action teams had little connection to CIA's intelligence functions but represented a large drain on the Agency's budget, voiced his hope that Helms could disengage the Agency from such operations. The DCI made it clear that this matched his own preferences. Russell's admonitions reflected a conviction held by most members of the four Congressional subcommittees that the CIA budget should be as small as possible in order to avoid attracting unwanted attention. When Agency-managed programs grew too large and visible, as RDC now threatened to do, Russell and his colleagues believed that the Pentagon should assume responsibility for them, to prevent budgetary and security strains that CIA was not designed to handle.

Acting on Russell's wishes, Helms met with the director of the Bureau of the Budget on 4 October 1966, in an unsuccessful effort to convince him that some other government agency might better carry out the RDC program. Instead, Helms got new White House orders not only to maintain the current level of activities, but also to request a supplementary $38 million from Congress to expand Agency RDC operations.

At this point, George Mahon and Carl Hayden, the chairmen of the House and Senate Appropriations subcommittees, intervened. In a 6 April 1967 letter to the Bureau of the Budget they pointed out the difficulties in handling funds for an open program as a classified budget item and asked that some other method of funding the RDC program be found for the coming fiscal year. The Bureau of the Budget's reply noted that, while the matter was receiving careful consideration, they nevertheless requested the full appropriations for FY 1968. In response, Congress authorized funds for the RDC program for only nine months. Although with Senator Russell's permission CIA provided some residual support for 15 months after the 1 April 1968 funding cutoff, firm Congressional backing allowed the Agency to escape a burden that threatened its ability to perform other more important missions. Moreover, it managed this in spite of administration wishes that the Agency continue running the RDC program.[39]

Mahon and Russell played a similar if less visible role in 1969 in pressing the Pentagon to take over CIA responsibilities for the paramilitary programs in Indochina known as SWITCHBACK and MACSOG. In each case the operations' expansion in size had created funding problems for the Agency. And in each case Congressional prodding forced a reluctant Pentagon to phase CIA out of the programs.

[39]Details of this episode may be found in John S. Warner, Deputy General Counsel, Draft Memorandum, 14 September 1971, Office of General Counsel Records; and in unsigned, undated memorandum, "RDC and SWITCHBACK Funding (Congressional Briefings, Memos and Letters)."

The Agency's involvement in extensive paramilitary operations in Laos demonstrated both the benefits of Congressional support and the problems that a single unsympathetic Congressman could cause. The Agency had been supplying and directing irregular forces in Laos since the beginning of the 1960s. In 1970, in response to stepped-up enemy pressure and the exhaustion of Lao manpower resources,

CIA briefed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on its operations in Laos as early as 1962, and during the ensuing years more than 50 Senators received information on one or more occasions on Agency participation in the Lao paramilitary program. Probably no legislator was more fully conversant with CIA activities in Laos than Missouri's Stuart Symington, and for many years the Senator was the Agency's most outspoken champion in Laotian matters. Clifton Strathern, one of the Agency's most experienced Laos hands, has recalled the preferential treatment Symington received from DDP operatives in Laos during his several visits there: the Senator "was given literally a staff briefing in the same manner that we would have given the Director, we would have given the chief of the division, or anybody else. He was taken upcountry; he visited with Vang Pao [the Meo leader]; there was never any effort to have anyone withhold or not discuss some aspect of our operations."[40] Complete candor was the rule; Headquarters instructed Strathern and his colleagues "to be totally open, frank, and make no effort to withhold any aspect, including even cryptonyms."[41]

Following a 1967 field inspection of CIA operations, Symington arranged to have the Vientiane Chief of Station, Ted Shackley, report on the war in Laos to the full Senate Armed Services Committee. After the briefing, the Missouri Democrat approvingly commented that the annual budget for all Laos operations was less than the cost of a single day's fighting in Vietnam, clearly implying that this was the way to prosecute a war.[42] As American public opinion shifted against the war in Southeast Asia, however, Symington's enthusiasm for CIA activities in Laos waned. By the fall of 1969, his requests to have Helms testify before a Foreign Relations subcommittee on the Agency's involvement in Laos had begun to worry the DCI.

By midyear even firm Agency supporters had concluded that the Laos operations had now reached the size where they should

[40]Strathern interview, 7 April 1983.
[41]*Ibid.*
[42]*Ibid.*; John S. Warner, Legislative Counsel. Memorandum for the Record, 5 October 1967, Office of Legislative Counsel Records; Warner interview, 22 August 1983.

become a Defense Department responsibility. On 9 July 1970, Russell informed Helms that he opposed any plan to have CIA shoulder the additional costs [redacted] Five days later, Mahon associated himself with this position.[43]

The reluctance of Russell and Mahon to see CIA undertake these new responsibilities was only partly out of concern for the size of the Agency's budget. Increasingly, a new and more fundamental worry influenced the chairmen and ranking members of CIA's subcommittees. As opposition to the war in Indochina mounted, a growing number of antiwar legislators came to believe that the Nixon White House was using the Agency's special authorities to hide administration activities in Southeast Asia from Congress, even to circumvent Congressional desires. Informed that the CIA bankrolled the controversial paramilitary operations in Laos, and denied the right to examine the Agency or its finances, several Congressmen proposed measures that would unveil the CIA budget or place restrictions on covert activity. For instance, complaining that the White House had developed "a new and cynical formula for running a war, out of sight of the Congress and the American people," Representative Herman Badillo (D-NY) introduced a measure to prohibit the Agency from organizing guerrilla operations.[44] Russell and Mahon's objections to funding [redacted] were thus an attempt to protect the Agency by defusing some of the suspicions of their antiwar colleagues. For the moment they succeeded, for Badillo's proposal was quashed.

Fulbright, on the other hand, was not so easily thwarted. In late February 1971, he asked Helms to give the Foreign Relations Committee a special briefing on Laos. Since Senator Russell had died a month earlier, the DCI dispatched Jack Maury to consult with John Stennis, who had succeeded Russell as the Agency's principal sponsor in the Senate. Maury suggested that Stennis take the position that such matters fell within the jurisdiction of the Armed Services Committee, thereby making it inappropriate for CIA to testify. Unpersuaded, Stennis declined to block Fulbright's request. Noting that "we Committee chairmen don't like to get into arguments with each other on jurisdictional matters," he told Maury that it would be very difficult to defend the proposition that CIA-supported activities in Southeast Asia were none of the Foreign Relations Committee's business.[45] Agency insiders must have compared Stennis's decision unfavorably with the vigorous responses they had come to expect from Russell.

[43] Unsigned memorandum, "Congressional Attitude Toward CIA Funding of Major Paramilitary Activities," 17 September 1971.
[44] *Congressional Record*, Vol. 117: 14912.
[45] John M. Maury, Jr., Legislative Counsel. Memorandum for the Record, 1 March 1971, Office of Legislative Counsel Records.

The American-backed South Vietnamese invasion of Laos in early 1971 precipitated an increasing number of Congressional proposals that would have stripped CIA of some of its broad authorities. In addition to Badillo's resolution barring the CIA from most paramilitary activities, Senator George McGovern (D-SD) introduced a bill that would reveal the Agency's budget figure and require a separate appropriations act for CIA each year. Symington sought to place a ceiling on all government expenditures for intelligence purposes. Failing in this, he got Congress to approve a bill setting a budgetary cap for most expenditures in Laos. While the measure did not specifically mention CIA, Langley officials worried that it formed a dangerous precedent that could be extended in the future to Agency expenditures elsewhere.

On 3 August 1971, Fulbright's Foreign Relations Committee released a sanitized version of a staff report acknowledging the extent of Agency involvement in Laos. The fact that these activities were still in progress made this revelation all the more unusual. It was at this point that Senator Symington, who had been briefed on CIA's work in Laos for years, solemnly labeled it "a secret war." It was a phrase that Agency officers never forgave. Yet it stuck, in spite of CIA's efforts to ridicule the idea that it would or could undertake such extensive operations without the approval of, at a minimum, its four Congressional subcommittees. Most Agency officers found the words of Iowa Senator Jack Smith closer to the truth: in response to Symington's indignation, Smith warned his colleagues not to "leave the impression that the Senate somehow or other has been helpless in this matter. . . . [L]et us not say the Senate has been hoodwinked or leave the impression we have been misled and have not known what is going on."[46]

By this time, CIA supporters on the Hill had concluded that the longer the Agency remained involved in Laos, the more likely Congress was to adopt some of the restrictive measures being proposed. CIA was too important to risk its effectiveness by undertakings of this sort, Stennis told Maury. For its own good, CIA had to extract itself from the controversial war. Acting on this belief, the Mississippi Senator informed President Nixon in a letter of 2 September 1971 that he was determined that CIA's involvement in Laos should under no circumstances extend beyond the current fiscal year. A memorandum written a few days later by the CIA's Legislative Counsel explained Stennis's thinking further:

> He said we have trouble enough without this thing. That we have more important work in providing intelligence and he doesn't think we should be mixed up in things that interfere with this. Said to get some sub-rosa outfit to

[46]US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on US Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, *Laos: April 1971*, Staff Report, 3 August 1971, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., (Washington, DC: GPO, 1971); Senator Jack Smith's quote in *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, XXVII (1971), 357.

> do just this kind of thing. I said that is what we were set up for. He said then get a sub-sub-rosa outfit—let the Pentagon or the White House have a sub-rosa outfit, the Agency has to be free to do what is so important—that is collecting intelligence.[47]

DCI Helms largely agreed with Stennis's assessment of the dangers that further Agency involvement in Laos entailed and appreciated the Senator's efforts to disentangle CIA. At the same time, Stennis's ultimatum to Nixon placed the Director in a uncertain position within the administration. White House officials insinuated that Stennis would not have written such a letter unless pressed to do so by the Agency. In conferring with Stennis about this problem, Maury observed that while the DCI wished to be responsive to the policymakers, Helms recognized that he could not afford to ignore Congressional sentiments. The Legislative Counsel then predicted that "we were going to have a pretty rough time trying to adjust to the will of Congress and at the same time follow the directions and desires of the Administration," and warned Stennis that the Agency might have to call on him for assistance.[48]

Seeking to formulate a response to Stennis's letter, a member of Kissinger's NSC staff requested comments from the Agency. In his reply of 20 September 1971, Helms observed that, in light of the Senator's concerns, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the CIA to continue its activities in Laos. "Those key committees on whom we depend for our appropriations and our protection from damaging public exposure and political debate," the DCI explained, "appear firmly committed to the proposition that they cannot support the continued inclusion of funds in the Agency's budget for Laos-type operations." Moreover, Helms went on, he thought it "extremely doubtful that they will long countenance the Agency's conduct of such operations even if the funds were overtly appropriated as a line item in the Defense budget." The DCI concluded his memorandum by warning that the longer CIA stayed in Laos, the more likely it was that Congress would adopt legislation designed to limit the capacity of the Agency, and hence the administration, to undertake covert operations elsewhere around the globe.[49] As with the RDC, SWITCHBACK, and MACSOG programs, Helms had found Congressional opposition to administration policies a useful means to persuade the White House to allow CIA to back out of an operation that had grown too unwieldy for Agency resources.

[47]John M. Maury, Jr., Legislative Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 14 September 1971, Office of Legislative Counsel Records; unsigned (probably Maury), Memorandum for the Record, undated (c. 14 September 1971), Office of Legislative Counsel Records.
[48]*Ibid.*
[49]Richard M. Helms, Director of Central Intelligence, Memorandum for Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 20 September 1971, Executive Registry Records.

Congressional debate over CIA's role in Laos produced some of the sharpest criticism of Agency practices in its first quarter century of existence. Yet it is difficult in retrospect to see what Richard Helms might reasonably have done to avert the tide of abuse that came CIA's way. As he repeatedly pointed out, it had been a "secret war" only in the sense that the American public—at the explicit direction of three Presidents and Congressional leaders of both parties—had not been informed of American policy. But the Congress certainly had not been denied knowledge of Agency operations in Laos. In conformity with existing practices, CIA had assiduously kept dozens of senior Congressmen and Senators informed of its activities over the years.

By the early 1970s, however, these practices no longer commanded the unquestioning support in Congress they once had enjoyed. Legislative Counsel Maury, in his OLC annual report for 1971, explained the matter. "The Congressional power structure, which has for a quarter of a century served to shield the Agency from intrusion or attack by the rank-and-file membership, is in a state of flux," he wrote. Russell and Rivers were dead; other longtime Agency supporters, including Stennis, Mahon, Allen Ellender, and Edward Hébert, were in their seventies or even eighties.

> One need not go far down the seniority lists of the committees over which these men preside [Maury continued] to find members of substantially different temperment [sic] and outlook. They include men who have over the years become increasingly suspicious or jealous of the secretive manner in which the Agency oversight committees have exercised their responsibilities. And their ranks are being periodically reinforced by newly elected younger members. Many of these feel that because of the increasingly important role of the Agency in providing inputs to crucial policy decisions its information and its activities should be more broadly accessible [sic] to the Legislative Branch, and some of them appear to have been infected by the anti-establishment and anti-Agency campaigns of the "New Left." Faced with the resulting pressures, our aging and harassed protectors and benefactors on the Hill can no longer be expected to hold the old lines.

The death of Richard Russell in January 1971 robbed the old system of perhaps its leading defender and reduced the obstacles confronting those who would create a new, more egalitarian order in the Senate. Russell possessed the stature and the power to suppress incipient rebellion among the younger Senators who sought to overturn the seniority system and the formerly unchallengeable authority of committee chairmen. But John Stennis, his successor as head of Armed Services, commanded neither the respect nor the clout Russell had wielded, and ultimately proved unable to block the demands for Congressional reform that would dilute his authority and restrict his ability to shield the CIA as Russell had done. Moreover, Russell's passing suddenly made the personal animosity between Senators

Symington and Stennis something more than simply a private matter. Many Agency officers came to believe that a vindictive Symington sought to embarrass his rival by promoting the idea that Stennis's Armed Services Committee was irresponsibly lax in supervising Agency operations in Southeast Asia.

More than this, however, the increasingly virulent relations between the executive and the legislative branches of the government, in large measure stimulated by disagreement over the war in Southeast Asia, contributed to the Agency's problems with its Laos operations. Many of the limitations on Agency activities that Congress proposed arose not from unhappiness with CIA per se, but from a widespread sense that the legislative branch must reassert its voice in the conduct of national security policy. Restrictions placed on CIA in 1971 and later often had the broader purpose of limiting the administration's freedom of action in Southeast Asia; they were aimed at CIA only insofar as the Agency had been used to circumvent Congressional desires. In this important sense, Richard Helms found himself and his agency in the midst of a constitutional controversy over the rightful division of powers in foreign affairs. CIA was but a pawn in this far larger struggle.

Helms appreciated that this placed his organization in danger and moved to protect the Agency from Congressional sniping. He and his OLC officers frequently reminded the oversight subcommittees of CIA's continuing desire for regular meetings. He enlisted Senator Henry Jackson (D-WA) to press first Russell and later Stennis for more formal and structured contacts with CIA's Congressional supervisors. Under Helms's direction OLC established a program to contact all freshmen Senators and Congressmen, and from time to time Helms met with his Legislative Counsel to select key lawmakers that OLC should target for special attention.

But the Congressional old guard remained largely impervious to the need for making concessions to the more demanding mood prevalent among the younger Members of Congress. In 1971, Stennis did not call a single formal meeting of the Armed Services/CIA subcommittee; the Appropriations subcommittee met only once. Matters in the House were no better. When Louisiana's Edward Hébert succeeded Mendel Rivers as head of the Armed Services CIA subcommittee on the latter's death in 1970, one of his first actions was to announce the dissolution of the oversight subcommittee. Maury finally confessed to a ranking Senate staffer that the DCI felt most uncomfortable because he believed that Fulbright's Foreign Relations Committee was better informed of Agency affairs than the CIA's own subcommittees were. The situation invited disaster, which, in the form of exhaustive Congressional investigation, was not long in coming. In a strange twist of irony, the Agency's supporters brought it nearly as much grief as its detractors.

On the Eve of the Storm

As Richard Helms prepared in early 1973 to step down after six and a half years as DCI, he left for his successor a troubled, yet surprisingly favorable relationship with Capitol Hill. Congressional respect for the Agency's intelligence product had never stood higher. By pushing for wider dissemination of CIA studies and estimates, the legislators were implicitly acknowledging how central to their own responsibilities the Agency had become. Faced with incredibly complex issues often involving arcane or technical matters, the lawmakers increasingly turned to CIA experts for help in sorting out a welter of conflicting or indecipherable information. Nowhere was this continued reliance on the Agency more concretely demonstrated than in the 1972 SALT I treaty, for the Senate would never have ratified the accord if the legislators had not been convinced that CIA could detect any significant Soviet violations. As the nation's security came more and more to rely on the latest in technological wizardry, Congress was increasingly persuaded of the crucial importance of the intelligence professional.

At the same time—and somewhat paradoxically—the new 93rd Congress that convened in January 1973 was, in comparison to the Congress of 1966, considerably more outspoken in its demands on the CIA, which now included access to intelligence information, disclosure of Agency budget figures, restrictions on CIA covert action authorities, and more rigorous legislative oversight. Reflecting these changed conditions, Legislative Counsel Maury noted in his year-end report for 1972 that "even our staunch friends are leaning increasingly toward a narrow concept of the Agency's mission, particularly where paramilitary and political operations are concerned."

Congressional concern over "executive encroachment" placed an added burden on Agency managers. So, too, did persistent reports linking CIA to the Watergate break-in. Finally, earlier Congressional inhibitions that had discouraged the leaking of sensitive Agency information appeared to have eroded. Although these developments had not created serious problems for Helms, they were nonetheless a source of concern. CIA could now expect its critics to seize on any intelligence failures or operational blunders in ways unimaginable a decade earlier.

Maury's recommendations for suitable defensive measures demonstrate the limited range of options Agency officials believed open to them. Although warning that CIA would probably have to give tactical ground to forestall restrictive legislation, Maury held that in the main, "we must rely on the professionalism of our operations, on the integrity of our product, and on our responsiveness to the legitimate interests and demands of both the Legislative and the Executive Branches to see us through [this] patch of political turbulence."[50]

[50]John M. Maury, Jr., Legislative Counsel. Memorandum for James R. Schlesinger, Director of Central Intelligence. 12 February 1973.

Maury's prescription, which implied that CIA could do little more than batten down the hatches until the current squalls blew over, reflected a certain failure of imagination that badly served the Agency's interests. Helms's OLC officers seem to have gauged their effectiveness primarily in terms of dissuading Congress from passing harmful legislation. This was an important task, to be sure, and by this yardstick OLC succeeded in maintaining reasonably cordial Congressional-Agency ties. But this preoccupation with legislation may have rendered them less sensitive to the intangibles of the relationship, to the shadowy but important shift in mood and expectations that would propel the Agency into an unwanted limelight only months after Helms's departure. Certainly neither Helms nor his senior lieutenants appreciated the extent to which the old methods and the old rules no longer applied.

Similarly, their principal response to Symington's allegations about a "secret war" in Laos was a deeply felt sense of having been betrayed by a trusted friend. Attacked from so unexpected a quarter, Agency officers instinctively withdrew, slipping into a siege mentality that did more to inflame than to assuage Congressional critics. Moreover, this defensive, suspicious reaction precluded any real examination of the complaints being lodged against CIA. Yet without an understanding of the reasons behind the attacks on CIA, Agency officers could do little to avert the cataclysmic rupture in Congressional-Agency ties that the legislative investigations of 1973-76 produced.

Could Richard Helms have prevented such a trauma? Probably not. The outside pressures were simply too many, the confluence of forces bearing down on CIA too powerful. Helms had the misfortune to head the Agency just as a new mood of skepticism and self-assertiveness swept over Congress. The dissolution of the foreign policy consensus that had shielded CIA for a quarter century combined with a liberal dosage of bitterness over Vietnam and a generalized disillusionment with governmental power to reinforce this less quiescent attitude upon Capitol Hill. As an important instrument of the orthodoxy now being questioned, the CIA naturally attracted new interest.

The nature of the legislative process often worked to the Agency's disadvantage as well. OLC staffer George Cary, a future Legislative Counsel himself, has observed that, because of their limited access to information, Members of Congress "don't know enough to ask the right questions." As a consequence, "it's important for the senior people in the intelligence business to not only respond to the specific requests that come from the Congress, but, if you will, to force-feed the Congress on things that they ought to know about." Yet as long as oversight of the Agency remained a part-time concern, senior members of the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees who sat on the CIA subcommittees were simply too busy to devote the necessary hours to Agency matters, as Helms

repeatedly found when he pressed for more consultations. "[I]f it wasn't an absolute crisis situation, you frequently couldn't . . . force your way into it," Cary remembers.[51]

On the other hand, Helms might have mitigated some of the fury of the subsequent Congressional onslaught. Three remarkably similar reactions to the DCI, spaced over a number of years, suggest one of the problems. In 1967, after hearing the DCI brief the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Barratt O'Hara observed that Helms's answers had been very sketchy. "Mr. Director, I wish to compliment you," O'Hara stated, with a mixture of respect and chagrin. "You have been an admirable witness, but you are leaving us without very much information." Five years later, Carl Marcy, chief of staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, echoed O'Hara's comment. Helms, he told a journalist, had a good reputation on the Hill for integrity, "but you've got to know what to ask him." And writing in 1974, Representative Lucien Nedzi, appointed three years earlier to head a revitalized Armed Services CIA subcommittee, recalled a meeting with Helms where he had told the DCI: "You've been very cooperative in answering my questions. The trouble is I'm not sure I'm asking the right questions."[52]

Here, then, is the famous Helms reticence, a reluctance to reveal more than was absolutely necessary. Such a close-lipped approach may have been understandable, even laudatory in a DCI; it nonetheless impeded communication and left many interlocutors discontented. When combined with the legislative branch's institutional constraints and explicit instructions from Russell, Rivers, and others that limited Agency visibility, the inevitable consequence was that most Members of Congress got remarkably little reliable information about Agency purposes and achievements.

As a result, many members of the Congress combined a personal respect for Helms with a dissatisfaction with the overall state of legislative oversight of CIA. A phone conversation between Maury and Senator Symington in December 1972 nicely illustrates this meshing of sentiments. Symington was calling to inquire about rumors that Nixon had dismissed Helms as DCI. Remarking that Helms's departure would distress him greatly, the Missouri Senator then launched into a monologue on the inadequate nature of Congressional supervision of the CIA. According to Maury's notes, Symington declared that "the only reason this situation had been tolerated was because of the respect which the Congress had for Mr. Helms, who had always been completely 'the soul of honor' when he

[51]Cary interview, 30 September 1983.
[52]Transcript of DCI Briefing, House Foreign Affairs Committee, 21 February 1967; John M. Maury, Jr., Legislative Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 4 April 1972, Office of Legislative Counsel Records; Lucien N. Nedzi, "Oversight or Overlook: Congress and the U. S. Intelligence Agencies," *Studies in Intelligence* 18 (Summer 1974): 20 (CONFIDENTIAL).

appeared before Congressional committees and whose intelligence assessments had proved far more accurate than those of other Government agencies." Symington concluded by observing that if Helms left the Agency, "it will change a lot of things around here."[53] The Senator's words constituted both a tribute to Richard Helms and an ominous warning for the future.

Helms was a man of the system who took charge of CIA just as the old rules governing CIA's relations with Congress were collapsing. His were the years of the gathering storm, and he left just before the deluge. Confronted with increasing restiveness and a growing Congressional predisposition to challenge the CIA, Helms made concessions as he thought appropriate. His years as DCI were considerably more open than those of any of his predecessors. Yet in retrospect we can see that his adjustments were piecemeal and often lacked the support or understanding of CIA's legislative sponsors. They failed to placate the Agency's detractors because they did not address the fundamental concerns underlying their criticisms.

That they failed to do so leads us back to the contradictions that mark Richard Helms's management of the CIA-Congressional relationship. Between 1966 and early 1973, Helms succeeded in preserving a rough equilibrium in that relationship. His contemporaries, including many suspicious of Agency activities, generally applauded the DCI for maintaining a reasonably satisfactory partnership between two institutions whose relationship contains inherent tensions. Yet while Helms managed to contain the pressures threatening to destroy this uneasy balance, he and his Agency proved unable to relieve or divert them. As it turned out, both Helms and his successors were severely wounded by the eventual explosion.

[53]John M. Maury, Jr., Legislative Counsel, Memorandum for the Record, 18 December 1972, Office of Legislative Counsel Records.

Chapter 8

Watergate

Russell Jack Smith

The break-in at Democratic campaign chairman Lawrence O'Brien's office in the Watergate complex on the night of 16-17 June 1972 has been so thoroughly chronicled that it would be idle to recount it in all its sorry detail. Suffice it to say, the ramifications of this "third-rate burglary," which eventually led to the unprecedented resignation of the President of the United States, also embroiled Richard Helms and may have led to his dismissal . Unlike Nixon's, however, Helms's dismissal was not the consequence of his or his Agency's involvement in the Watergate mess, but instead may have been influenced by his resolute refusal to permit the White House to use CIA as an instrument in its elaborate coverup of the crime.

CIA's connection with Watergate was through two retired former employees, James McCord and E. Howard Hunt. McCord, who had retired in August 1970, was one of the five burglars arrested on that eventful night in 1972. When material found on the men established a connection with Hunt, Director of Security Howard Osborn notified Helms of this development. At his 19 June morning staff meeting, Helms noted McCord's arrest and the possible implication of Hunt, and advised those present that their response to any question regarding the two should be "limited to a statement that they are former employees who retired" in 1970.[1]

This statement was perfectly true, but later investigation revealed that after retirement Hunt had used his former Agency employment to obtain minor assistance with marginally or totally illegal activities on behalf of the White House. In July 1971, the White House had hired Hunt as a "security consultant" and member of the so-called Plumber's Group to assist in plugging leaks of national security information—a problem that in 1970-71 engrossed much of official Washington. Concern reached a high pitch following news stories accurately detailing US tactics and positions in SALT talks, followed by *The New York Times*' publication of the

[1]Morning Meeting Minutes, 19 June 1972.

Pentagon Papers. The Nixon White House responded with a characteristic mixture of paranoia and deviously aggressive tactics. Spurred by the intensity of this high-level concern, as well as the DCI 's statutory responsibilities for protecting intelligence sources and methods, Helms instituted a number of steps to tighten security. As a part of this ongoing effort, he prepared for Nixon a detailed study of leaks to the press that had occurred during Nixon's administration.

Given this background, there appeared to be nothing sinister in the July 1971 telephone call from top Nixon aide John Ehrlichman to Helms's Deputy Director, Gen. Robert Cushman, USMC, requesting minor assistance on "security matters" for Howard Hunt.[2] After all, CIA and the DCI were also interested in protecting classified material. Accordingly, CIA authorized this assistance. Hunt proceeded to exploit this narrow opening to obtain other assistance, but eventually went too far. At Helms's direction, on 25 August 1971, all further assistance was cut off.[3]

Before the cutoff, however, Helms had reluctantly approved, and the Agency had complied with, a White House request to prepare a psychological profile of Daniel Ellsberg, the former RAND employee identified as the man who had stolen and released the *Pentagon Papers*. On receiving this request, Helms had remonstrated with White House staffer David Young, stressing CIA's reluctance to undertake a profile of a US citizen. Nevertheless, Young at last persuaded him on the grounds that this was consonant with his responsibility for protecting sources and methods.[4] This decision was perhaps more instrumental than any other in sustaining the cloud of suspicion that hung over the question of CIA's involvement in Watergate. Although Ellsberg's profile had no connection with the 16 June 1972 Watergate break-in, the Agency's involvement with Ellsberg suggested to many that CIA was capable of undertaking illegal actions against US citizens.

Howard Hunt was the connection between Daniel Ellsberg and Watergate. Unknown to Helms and CIA, Hunt's other activities on behalf of the White House included a range of dirty tricks against Nixon's Democratic opponents in the 1972 election. These included the bugging and break-in of the Watergate office of the Democratic Presidential campaign chairman. It was Hunt who hired the five participants, all but one of whom was an associate from the 1961 attempted invasion of Cuba's Bay of Pigs, and even provided one of these with cover identification materials

[2]US Congress, House, Special Subcommittee on Intelligence of the Committee on Armed Services, *Inquiry into the Alleged Involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency in the Watergate and Ellsberg Matters*, 93rd Cong., 1st sess., 1973 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1973), (hereafter cited as House, *Watergate*), p. 5.
[3]Karl Wagner, Memorandum for the Record, 27 August 1971.
[4]Richard Helms testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, 2 August 1973.

borrowed from CIA. Hunt monitored the operation from a motel room across the street, and when James McCord was captured inside the Watergate office building, his pockets contained a check from Hunt.

Soon, the trail led from Hunt to the CIA. Numerous investigations followed the events of the Watergate break-in—so many and so thoroughly reported that, for most Americans, "Watergate" has come to mean the Congressional and judicial inquiries rather than the office complex or the events that took place there. None of these investigations has ever found that CIA's involvement went beyond the minimal support provided Hunt; nevertheless, the cloud of suspicion has clung tenaciously and may never completely dissipate.

Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, 1972-76

To a considerable extent this is because of the Nixon White House's repeated efforts to involve CIA in the subsequent coverup. Although Helms and CIA resisted these efforts, the White House campaign was so prolonged and many faceted that investigators have found it difficult to track down and resolve each part of the story.

The White House's campaign began within a week after the break-in. On 23 June 1972, John Ehrlichman summoned Helms and his newly appointed Deputy Director, Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters, USA, to his office. Unknown to Helms, the reason for the meeting was that, in investigating the break-in, the FBI had stumbled on some Nixon campaign contribution checks routed through Mexico. As the White House tapes would later reveal, Nixon that morning had directed his other top aide, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, to call in Helms and Walters and tell them to instruct Acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray to shut off further investigation leading to Mexico .[5]

Haldeman began by telling his visitors that the Watergate incident was causing a lot of trouble and that the FBI investigation was leading to "a lot of important people." He asked what CIA's connection was to the break-in. Helms replied that there was none. Then turning to General

[5]*Washington Star News*, 11 November 1973.

Walters, Haldeman said that the White House thought that Walters should tell Patrick Gray that it would not be advantageous to push the inquiry further, "especially in Mexico." Helms then told Haldeman that he had spoken with Gray the day before and had specifically assured him that CIA was not involved in the Watergate break-in and that none of the FBI's investigations was touching any covert CIA projects. Virtually ignoring Helms, Haldeman again addressed Walters, saying that "it had been decided at the White House" that FBI's Mexico investigation might run into CIA operations there. Helms repeated that CIA was not connected in any way with Watergate, but Walters agreed to make the call. Following Ehrlichman's suggestion that he should do this "soon," he made an appointment within an hour.[6]

After leaving the White House, Helms and his newly appointed deputy briefly discussed Walters' forthcoming meeting with Gray. Helms advised Walters to go only so far as to remind FBI's Acting Director of the existing "delimitation" agreement between the two agencies that required FBI to notify CIA if it ran into an Agency operation.[7] Nevertheless, at the meeting Walters told Gray what Haldeman had asked him to; namely, that any ongoing investigation of the Mexican aspects of Watergate could jeopardize CIA covert actions in the area. Walters later justified this on the grounds that he "genuinely believed that Haldeman had some information that I did not have and agreed to go to Gray and convey the message as I had been directed."[8] He apparently did not notice the anomaly that he, not Helms, was the chosen messenger and evidently did not suspect that this choice might have been motivated by the fact that he, unlike Helms, was a Nixon appointee and therefore more susceptible to White House influence. As he says, "It simply did not occur to me that the Chief of Staff to the President might be asking me to do something that was illegal or wrong."[9] In any event, after this wobbly beginning, Walters responded with resolute integrity to subsequent White House pressure.

Helms and his deputy chatted only briefly before Walters left for his meeting at the FBI, demonstrating fundamentally different assumptions about the occasion. General Walters, newly arrived in Washington from overseas service and accustomed to unquestioningly carrying out orders, perceived no problem in complying with Haldeman's directive. Helms, however, had spent most of his career watching the feints and maneuvers of White House aides and by now was in his fourth year of working at close quarters with the Nixon White House. He was fully aware of the President's antagonism to CIA, as well as Haldeman's and Ehrlichman's personal antagonism to Helms himself. He had gone to the Haldeman

[6]Vernon A. Walters, DDCI, Memorandum for the Record, 28 June 1972.
[7]House, *Watergate*, p. 16.
[8]Vernon A. Walters, *Silent Missions* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), p. 589.
[9]*Ibid*, p. 588.

meeting with his antennas sensitized, and several aspects of the encounter had put him on alert. Noting that Walters, the recent Nixon appointee, was the chosen instrument for approaching Gray, Helms understood the President 's staff well enough to realize that they confidently expected the new boy to carry out White House orders, whereas "outsider" Helms might not. After all, Walters owed his job to them. Even more striking, Acting FBI Director Patrick Gray had not been invited to the meeting. Why was it necessary, Helms wondered, to dispatch someone from CIA—and especially Walters—to turn off Gray's investigation? Finally, Helms noted that Haldeman had ignored his assurance, not once but three times, that CIA had no involvement with Watergate. Could it be, he wondered, that CIA was being positioned in some kind of devious White House maneuver?

All of this was troubling, but the aspect of the 23 June 1972 meeting with Haldeman that most disturbed Helms was the suggestion that the FBI investigation might open up "the Bay of Pigs thing." This was an allusion that Helms did not understand,[10] and Haldeman later confessed that he did not understand it, either. "I raised the question because I was told to," he informed the House Special Subcommittee on Intelligence.[11] The individual who gave him these instructions was Nixon, who told Haldeman just before he met with Helms and Walters, "Tell them . . . it's likely to blow the whole Bay of Pigs."[12] When Haldeman raised the issue, Helms responded angrily that he was not concerned about the Bay of Pigs, which had nothing to do with the matter at hand.[13] But the question was revealing: it had that devious, hardnosed White House smell. As Helms later told David Frost, "All I knew was that was a failure the Agency had, but I didn't see any reason to drag it into conversations we were having at the time."[14] But if the question had no objective meaning, it nonetheless conveyed a desire to touch a sore spot, to apply pressure. Helms recognized it for that and determined to proceed cautiously.

At this point, Helms's suspicions were founded on very little. He was reasonably confident that his Agency had no direct involvement with the Watergate break-in. As he told Patrick Gray by telephone the day before, when Gray called to ask whether the FBI might be "poking into a CIA operation," Helms had been "talking with his men . . . for the past few days, and . . . although they knew the people, they had no involvement in the Watergate break-in."[15] Nevertheless, Helms had clear proof that the

[10]Richard Helms, interview by David Frost, television transcript, Washington, DC, 22-23 May 1978 (hereafter cited as Helms interview, 22-23 May 1978).
[11]House, *Watergate*, p. 294.
[12]Transcript of Nixon White House tapes as quoted by Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA* (New York: Knopf, 1979), p. 334.
[13]*Hearings: Helms to Iran.*
[14]Helms interview, 22-23 May 1978.
[15]House, *Watergate*, p. 205.

President's two top aides were exercised over the FBI investigation of the affair and were trying to divert it, not through direct orders to Patrick Gray but through a newly appointed officer whom they seemed to feel they could pressure. It did not smell right. Accordingly, Helms advised Walters to go no further in his discussion with Gray than to remind him of the mutual CIA-FBI agreement about the exchange of information regarding each other's operations.

These suspicions hardened in Helms's mind over the next day or so and became a resolve to do everything he could to keep his Agency's skirts clear of the Watergate investigation. As he put it in his instructions to his officers, the goal was to "distance" CIA as far as possible from the affair and its aftermath. What contributed as much as anything to solidify his suspicion was the mounting White House pressure on CIA to protect those who had been arrested. This pressure, once again, was directed not at him but at General Walters.

On 26 June, the Monday immediately following his meeting with Patrick Gray, Walters was summoned to the White House by Counsel to the President, John Dean. After checking with Ehrlichman to make sure that Dean was authorized to discuss the matter with him, Walters complied. Dean reviewed the FBI investigation superficially and commented that one working theory was that CIA was involved. Walters responded that he had looked thoroughly into the matter over the weekend and was certain the Agency had no such connection. In reply, Dean pointed out that the "suspects," the former CIA employees, were wobbling, and hinted that the Agency might be involved without Walters knowing it.[16] Walters noted that they could not implicate the Agency and also pointed out the limitations on his authority to act independently.

When Walters reported back to Helms on this meeting, including his feeling that "some kind of fishing was going on, and that he would resign if need be," the DCI laid down firm guidelines for his new deputy:

> I want it to be clearly understood between us that you are not to agree to anything that will in any way besmirch this Agency . I don't care whether you are prepared to be a scapegoat or anything else, that is not the point. The Agency is not the Army or Navy or some big institution like that. It can hurt it badly by having somebody act improperly who was in the line of command, and I don't want you to acquiesce in a single thing that will besmirch this Agency .[17]

In his remarks Helms very firmly let his deputy know that the salvation of his personal honor was not enough; in Helms's view, the CIA's good name had a higher value.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Dean resumed the attack on Walters the next day by again summoning him to his office, this time to suggest that CIA might provide bail money and salaries for the suspects, using covert funds. Walters responded by reporting a conversation with Helms that indicated that, if CIA did as Dean suggested, he would first have to clear it with the oversight committees in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Walters added that to follow Dean's course of action would serve only to enlarge the problem.[18]

On 28 June, for the third consecutive day, Dean called in Walters and bluntly told him that the problem now was how to stop the FBI investigation beyond the five suspects. Walters repeated that as DDCI he had no independent authority to act, and any notion that he could do so was a delusion. This session ended with Dean appearing to agree that CIA participation was unacceptable.[19]

By this time it was abundantly clear to Helms that the White House—Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Dean—had been intent from the outset on hooking CIA into the Watergate affair, either by getting the Agency to admit an involvement it did not have or by coaxing it into blocking the train of events, including the FBI investigations, that followed. Helms became more determined than ever to "distance" the Agency from the investigation. He instructed his officers that he wanted "no freewheeling exposition of hypotheses or any effort made to conjecture about responsibility or likely objectives of the Watergate intrusion."[20] Some investigators later interpreted this discretion by the DCI as an effort to cloak an Agency involvement that did not, in fact, exist.

For a period of time John Dean made no further effort to embroil CIA in the Watergate coverup. Acting FBI Director Patrick Gray made certain demands that seemed to be merely those of an officer in his position, and perhaps genuinely were so, although at this point neither Helms nor Walters could be certain that he was not proceeding under the influence and direction of the White House, most notably John Dean. Helms was also deeply concerned by signs that FBI officers of lesser rank were leaking information about the case to the press. Even more disturbing was the fact that all of Helms's assurances to Gray seemed to roll like water off a duck's back. Even before his telephone conversation with Gray just before the meeting with Haldeman and Ehrlichman, Helms had told the Acting FBI Director that the White House, not CIA, was the place to look for

[18]Vernon A. Walters, DDCI, Memorandum for the Record, 29 June 1972.
[19]*Ibid.*
[20]Richard M. Helms, DCI, Memorandum for Vernon A. Walters, DDCI, 28 June 1972.

Offical White House photo

White House inner circle: Henry Kissinger, John Ehrlichman, President Richard Nixon, and H. R. Haldeman

clues regarding the Watergate affair. "I don't know why Gray didn't believe me," Helms later told David Frost, "when I told him early on back at the time of the Watergate break-in that those fellows were involved with Ehrlichman."

> I did tell him that. I am certain he will tell you I told him. But for some reason, his people seemed to feel that the Agency was involved. . . . As a matter of fact, I told him in a telephone call I made at the time of the break-in. I think he was in Los Angeles. I said, "You'd better watch out because these fellows may have some connection with Ehrlichman." I knew Ehrlichman was the one who had arranged for the hiring of Howard Hunt.[21]

[21]Helms interview, 22-23 May 1978.

Why then did Patrick Gray behave as though none of Helms's statements to him had ever been made?

In view of these uncertainties, Helms instructed Walters to proceed with due caution in responding to a demand that Gray made in early July 1972. Gray asked Walters for a statement in writing to the effect that the FBI investigation of the two suspects with Mexican connections was endangering national security. Without this, Gray advised Walters, the FBI would be obliged to proceed with the investigation.

Walters went to Patrick Gray on 6 July and presented him with a memorandum detailing the entire relationship between CIA and the Watergate suspects, as well as the two individuals with Mexican connections that Gray had specifically mentioned. Walters said that he could not tell Gray to cease further investigations on the grounds that they might compromise national security, and still less could he make such a statement in writing. Gray said that he understood and added that he had told Haldeman and Ehrlichman that the investigation could not be turned off. He further added that there were leaks on the subject coming out of FBI.[22]

At Helms's direction, Walters returned to Gray a week later with a memorandum containing one further piece of information involving Howard Hunt. This had to do with the precise assistance that Hunt had requested and received in pursuit of his leak-plugging activities, including CIA's decision to end this assistance when his demands grew excessive. After thanking Walters, Gray said that he felt the Watergate scandal would lead quite high politically, adding that, in a recent conversation with the President, he had told Nixon that both he and Walters thought the President should fire those involved in the coverup regardless of their status. Both Gray and Walters agreed that they would resign their posts if necessary to protect their respective agencies.[23]

By this time, Helms was persuaded that Gray was trying to do the best job he could in the face of persistent pressure from the White House to back off. Nonetheless, by Gray's own admission the FBI was springing uncharacteristic leaks. This impelled Helms to take precautions to protect his officers and any information regarding them while at the same time attempting to be as cooperative as possible with the ongoing investigation. Therefore, in responding to questions from the Department of Justice about the Watergate suspects, Helms provided the information requested and assured the Attorney General of the Agency's full cooperation, while stressing the importance of handling the material carefully. After stating unequivocally that CIA had no involvement with Watergate, he requested that CIA be consulted with respect to any use that the Justice Department

[22]Walters, DDCI, Memorandum for the Record, 6 July 1972.
[23]Walters, DDCI, Memorandum for the Record, 12 July 1972.

might make of the information.[24] During the following months, there were, at Helms's direction, further exchanges of this sort between CIA and Justice representatives—a caution that some investigators subsequently interpreted as foot-dragging and indications of guilt.

John Dean's last effort to hook the Agency into the case came in February 1973, shortly after Helms's dismissal. Dean requested the new DCI, James Schlesinger, to retrieve from the Justice Department the various CIA memorandums that Justice had previously requested. Dean suggested leaving a card in Justice files indicating that this had been done because these materials were no longer pertinent. On Schlesinger's instructions, Walters informed Dean that the CIA would not do this. Such an action, he pointed out, would serve only to implicate the Agency. Once again, he repeated that there was no Agency involvement in the case, and any attempts to force such involvement could prove only harmful to the United States.[25] For nearly a year, after a shaky beginning, Walters had been following the guidelines established by Helms and repulsing White House efforts to use the Agency as a shield against exposure. Walters' rebuff of Dean was essentially the last defensive move in the long campaign by Helms to prevent the White House from dragging CIA into the role of an accomplice in covering up the Watergate break-in.

In Helms's view, by mid-July 1972 the Watergate incident no longer involved either him or CIA. He had made it clear that any assistance CIA had given Howard Hunt was provided merely to help staunch the unauthorized flow of national security information to the press. He had repeatedly denied that CIA had any direct connection with the break-in and had turned aside successive White House attempts to involve the Agency in the coverup. He had done his part, and, when he left the country to take up his post as Ambassador to Tehran, he expected that news of any further Watergate developments would reach him only through the pages of the Paris edition of the New York *Herald Tribune*. Instead, he found himself frequently returning to Congressional hearings in Washington in order to defend both himself and the CIA from distortion and innuendo.

The Nedzi Committee

The investigations had their source in a 30 January 1973 statement by Judge John J. Sirica when he found the six defendants guilty of the Watergate break-in. Judge Sirica observed that he believed there was more

[24]Helms, DCI, Memorandum for the Record, 18 October 1972.
[25]Walters Memorandum for the Record quoted in CIA Employee Bulletin #359, "DDCI Statement About the Watergate Case," 21 May 1973.

to be discovered about the affair, and he expressed the hope that a Senate investigating committee would be "granted power by Congress broad enough to get to the bottom of this case."[26]

First off the mark was the so-called Nedzi committee, the House Armed Services Committee's Special Subcommittee on Intelligence, chaired by Congressman Lucien R. Nedzi (D-MI). Hearings into the "Alleged Involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency in the Watergate and Ellsberg Matters" began in May 1973. Helms was called back from Tehran to testify on 17 May. The committee wanted to know more about the Agency's relationship with Howard Hunt immediately before the Ellsberg-related break-in of Dr. Fielding's office and the Watergate break-in. Helms stressed that "there was never the slightest intimation or indication that anything—what Mr. Hunt or anybody else was doing was illegal, improper, or anything else. . . . He was supported by a high-level representative of the White House, and up to that time we provided him with nothing . . . he couldn't have found elsewhere."[27] As for an appraisal of Hunt, Helms commented: "As far as I knew, he was a straightforward employee. He was a bit of a romantic, and I think had outsized views of his own capabilities which didn't match his capabilities."[28]

Chairman Nedzi found it difficult to understand why Ehrlichman's request to assist Hunt had not immediately disturbed Helms. "Such an unusual request," he observed, should have created "greater concern on your part." Helms replied, "When supposedly honorable people ask you to do something, and they tell you it is in the national interest, and the White House wants to get it done, and so forth, we are inclined to acquiesce if we can."[29]

The discussion then turned to the psychological profile that CIA had prepared on Daniel Ellsberg. Since the profile was ultimately intended for Hunt's use, the committee thought it likely that Hunt himself had made the initial request. Helms explained that the request had come from David Young , previously a member of Kissinger's staff but loaned to Ehrlichman for "stoppage of leaks, things of that sort." When Helms learned of the request, he went back to Young, saying, "Why would we be doing something like that?" Young replied that [redacted] they very much wanted the Agency to do it, that it had the highest White House level support, and so forth."[30] Thus, Young had initiated the request, and Helms pointed out that he had not learned of Hunt's connection with it until that very week.[31]

[26]*The New York Times, The Watergate Hearings,* 1973, p. 96.
[27]House, *Watergate*, p. 78.
[28]*Ibid.*, p. *82.*
[29]*Ibid.*, p. *84.*
[30]*Ibid.*, p. *85.*
[31]"This is totally new to me as of this week," Helms told the committee (*Ibid.*, p. 86).

The committee dwelt at some length on reports that CIA doctors and Helms himself had been reluctant to undertake the profile. Did this reluctance indicate awareness that an illegal action was involved? The committee seemed particularly interested in one sentence from a note Helms wrote to accompany the profile: "I do wish to underline the point," Helms had written, "that our involvement in this matter should not be revealed in any context, formal or informal."[32] Did this indicate an awareness on Helms's part that an illegal action was involved? Helms answered that the note was "most unfortunately worded," but that what he had in mind at the time was that the doctors were concerned about doing a profile based on so little evidence. Helms had told Young this orally before sending the note and profile, telling Young that "if he insisted on having this, if the White House needed it, we would deliver it, but we didn't believe they had been given a chance to do a good professional job."[33] Helms also pointed out that "a personality assessment . . . is a recital of a man's profile, how he reacts, and things of this kind. It is a delicate area, I quite confess. But it isn't a harmful area."[34]

In a subsequent discussion as to how Young's request was transmitted and to what degree CIA recognized that the request was improper, Chairman Nedzi pressed Helms hard, leading Congressman Bob Wilson to comment that "we must maintain a sense of fairness as far as the apparent triviality of the requests and the triviality of the actions. . . . If I were in the same spot, I know I would say if the President wants it, he must have a reason."[35] This, in turn, prompted Nedzi to respond that he had "the highest respect and regard" for the DCI, that he was not "enthusiastic of the program here this afternoon at all," but that "these are questions that are being asked," and the committee had "to assume the role of devil's advocate" lest it be open to the charge of whitewash.[36]

The Nedzi subcommittee hearings, which continued intermittently until July 1974, were scarcely a whitewash; they were searching and thorough, and they ended by vindicating both Helms and CIA. Nedzi himself described the Agency's responses as "entirely satisfactory," and Congressman Wilson (following Helms's testimony) commented: "I think your Agency was badly abused and you as an individual were badly abused." To this Helms replied, "I feel that way now, sir, I feel it deeply." Nedzi added, "We all feel it."[37]

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 87.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[35] *Ibid.* p. 91.
[36] *Ibid*, p. 91.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

The Ervin Committee

The Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities began its hearings on 17 May 1973, under the chairmanship of Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr. (D-NC). By August 1973, the committee had taken testimony from those convicted of the break-in, from top Presidential aides, and a host of lesser personalities. Helms was summoned to appear on 2 August. For the most part, the committee asked him about the assistance given Howard Hunt and the meeting between him and Ehrlichman, Haldeman, and Walters. Committee members also tried to clarify testimony that Helms and Walters had given the Senate Armed Services Committee on 17 May 1972. At one point, Senator Ervin told Helms, "I think you did a magnificent job."[38]

Senator Howard Baker (R-TN), vice chairman of the committee, took a different tack. Along with Minority Counsel Fred D. Thompson, he subjected Helms to very sharp questioning. Thompson, who went first, tried to cast doubt on any suggestion that Haldeman and Ehrlichman were trying to use CIA in a coverup. Instead, he pressed, given the number of ex-CIA employees involved and the fact that one of them (Martinez) was still on a CIA retainer, were not Haldeman and Ehrlichman justified in their concern about possible CIA involvement?[39]

Senator Baker took up where Thompson left off, suggesting that the Agency's failure to act promptly in investigating the circumstances of the Watergate break-in argued for some kind of CIA involvement. Compressing time sequences and using telescopic hindsight, Baker—as did others investigating the break-in—endowed minor and unrelated events with a significance totally beyond the imagination of those who had participated in them. For example, Baker had gone item by item through the materials Howard Hunt had requested from CIA, each time asking Helms to confirm the fact. He added CIA's printing and developing of film taken by Hunt before the Ellsberg-Fielding burglary and CIA's former employment of the captured burglars, and then wondered "if that doesn't lead to the idea that when these people are caught that somebody would certainly say, well, what was the CIA involvement?"[40] In reply, Helms pointed out that "there has been a tendency . . . to have everything run in real time, as though all these things were known . . . and that, therefore, one should have the good sense to know this thing or that thing at a certain period of time and . . . this was not the case."[41] He also added that the identification materials provided Hunt were scarcely useful in the Watergate break-in.

[38]*The New York Times, Watergate Hearings*, p. 608.
[39]US Congress, Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, *Investigation of Illegal or Improper Campaign Activities in the Presidential Election of 1972. Final Report*, 93rd Cong., 2d sess., Report No. 93-981 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1974) (hereafter cited as Senate, *Presidential Campaign Activities*), Book VIII, pp. 3,248-3,249.
[40]*Ibid.*, p. 3,266.
[41]*Ibid.*, p. 3,267.

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Senator Howard Baker

None of this deflected Baker. Describing the camera, tape recorder, wig, false identification, and speech alteration device that CIA had provided Hunt as an "elaborate and exotic spy set," he asked what these were used for, if not for the Watergate break-in. When Helms replied that he did not know, Baker asked why he had not launched an inquiry into it. "You know, a day after this happened, that . . . your former CIA agents and one still on the payroll were involved. Did you launch an investigation to see what was going on? . . . Did you talk to these people, pick up the phone and say what in the world is going on?"[42]

[42] *Ibid.*, pp. 3,277-3,278.

Helms pointed out that the men in question were in jail, that an FBI investigation of the affair was proceeding, and that any intervention on his part would have been highly improper. Baker admitted that the suspects were indeed in jail, but nonetheless declared, "If I had someone on my staff caught redhanded robbing a jewelry store, let alone the Democratic campaign headquarters, I have a hunch that I would have jumped up and down and screamed until I found out what happened."[43] To this, Helms simply replied, "I have no reason to question you might have done so."[44]

It was clear that, despite Baker's expressions of respect for Helms, his suspicions had not been allayed by the time the hearings came to a close. At one point the press quoted him as saying, "I can hear the animals crashing around in the jungle but I can't see them." When the Senate Select Committee issued its final report in June 1974, Baker took a separate section to express his own views, which were hardly temperate.[45] What underlay Baker's persistent attack?

To some extent, it may have been a partisan effort, a case of a leading Republican Senator doing his best to protect a Republican President and administration. To some extent, it may also have been an expression of personal antagonism to CIA as an institution, perhaps enhanced by a politician's awareness that such resentment was shared by a significant portion of both public and press. In addition, it may have arisen from a genuine lack of understanding on Baker's part, an unfamiliarity with the complexity of the circumstances that daily assault a DCI—a failure to perceive the difference in scale and range of responsibility between the office and staff of a US Senator and the hierarchical chain-of-command structure essential to the CIA. To Baker, the selected facts seemed to form so obvious a pattern. To him, the obscure men who had served under contract for the Bay of Pigs operations and the Cubans kept on minimum retainer to report on Cuban community affairs were "CIA agents," no different from all other agents. It was inconceivable to him that Richard Helms did not keep himself minutely informed of their activities. When Howard Hunt received support from Technical Services Division officers acting on the original instructions they had received from DDCI Robert Cushman, Baker could not believe that Helms did not know of this at once.

Perhaps Baker's antagonism drew on all of these elements. Perhaps there were other sources as well. Helms, however, looking back, has placed the most emphasis on Baker's desire to protect the President and the White House staff. "Howard Baker's attitude undoubtedly derived from a complex of factors," Helms has commented. "But my impression after mature

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 3,279.
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Hearings: Activities of the Central Intelligence Agency in Foreign Countries and in the United States*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 22 January 1975 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1975), p. 32.

reflection is that, in an effort to protect the President and his staff, he was energetically striving to identify a guilty source elsewhere. The CIA was an attractive target. I am not trying to impugn Senator Baker's motives. I think he found it very hard to come to the conclusion that the President had behaved so badly."[46]

In its final report of June 1974, the Senate Select Committee made several recommendations regarding the Watergate break-in and coverup, including the recommendation that the appropriate oversight committees of Congress "should more closely supervise the operations of the intelligence and law enforcement 'community.'" What the Select Committee had in mind was that the oversight committees should "continually examine the relations of the Federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies and the White House," promptly determining "if any revision of law is necessary relating to the jurisdiction or activities of these agencies."[47] Citing the statute that states that CIA "shall have no police, subpoena, law enforcement powers, or internal security functions," the committee declared that it had produced evidence that the White House had "sought and achieved CIA aid for the Plumbers" and "unsuccessfully sought to involve the CIA in the Watergate coverup." Based on this, the committee recommended hearings "to determine if more explicit statutory language would be useful to restrain the CIA to its legitimate sphere of operation."[48]

Helms could take satisfaction in the finding that the White House's attempts to drag CIA into the coverup were unsuccessful, but he was not pleased by the implication that the Agency had gone beyond its "legitimate sphere of operation." Technically, the charge was correct, but it ignored an underlying dilemma facing every Director of Central Intelligence. The DCI is charged with responsibility for protecting intelligence sources and methods but is enjoined by strict construction of the statute from taking any action within the United States to meet that responsibility. It is unrealistic to expect the FBI or any other law enforcement institution to be as alert to the sensitivity of CIA "sources and methods" and as vigilant in protecting them as the Agency itself. Herein lies an unresolved problem that Helms on several occasions pointed out to Congress, requesting relief on behalf of his successors.

After the Senate Select Committee hearings, followed by the US Supreme Court decision compelling Nixon to release his tapes, the subsequent impeachment hearings in the House Judiciary Committee, and the President's resignation in August 1974, the press continued its investigations into malfeasance within the deposed administration. In particular, a cloud of suspicion swirled around CIA, originating with the Agency's connection through Hunt to Watergate, but enlarged by rumors that even extended to the charge that CIA was responsible for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

[46]Richard Helms, interview by R. J. Smith, 12 June 1985.
[47]Senate, *Presidential Campaign Activities*, Final Report, pp. 101-102.
[48]*Ibid.* p. 102.

The Rockefeller Commission

Responding to new charges of illegal CIA activities, President Gerald R. Ford on 4 January 1975 created a commission of distinguished citizens, under the chairmanship of Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, whose purpose was to determine "whether any domestic CIA activities exceeded the Agency's statutory authority."[49] Nearly simultaneously, the US Senate established a select committee under the chairmanship of Senator Frank Church (D-ID) "to conduct an investigation and study of the intelligence activities of the United States."[50] The Rockefeller Commission issued its report in June 1975, the Church committee in April 1976. Both investigative bodies required Richard Helms to make repeated trips from his post in Tehran to Washington to testify and defend his stewardship of the Agency during his years as DCI.

Although the Rockefeller Commission spread its net wide, covering most of the Agency's activities since 1947, this study will focus only on that portion of the Commission's study that dealt with Watergate. The Commission directed its attention on seven Watergate-related topics, ranging from CIA's suspected operational use of Howard Hunt after his retirement (it found none) to the Agency's response to post-Watergate investigations. Although the Commission absolved CIA of any direct responsibility in the Watergate affair, it was critical of the Agency's performance in several aspects.

Assigning most of the blame on the White House staff for the CIA's involvement in assisting Howard Hunt, the Commission, nevertheless, criticized the Agency "for having used insufficient care in controlling the use of the materials it supplied."[51] The Commission also criticized the Agency for having prepared a psychological profile of Daniel Ellsberg: "The preparation of a psychological profile of an American citizen who is not involved in foreign intelligence activities is not within the Agency's statutory authority." Acknowledging the dilemma that requests such as this posed to the Director, confronting him with having to choose between serving the President or complying with his understanding of the Agency's statutory limitations, the Commission reached a stark solution: "at times . . . a Director may well have to conclude he has no alternatives but to submit his resignation."[52]

Having absolved the Agency of all responsibility in Hunt's break-in of Dr. Fielding's office, the Commission next addressed White House efforts, including some by President Nixon himself, to obtain and exploit for

[49]Rockefeller Commission, p. ix.
[50]Church committee, Book I, p. iii.
[51]Rockefeller Commission, pp. 181-182.
[52]*Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.

political purposes certain sensitive CIA files on Vietnam from the Kennedy presidency. Although the Commission Report noted that Helms was not aware of the use intended for these files, and that he has insisted that the request came directly to him from the President himself, the Commission, nevertheless, again concluded that in this untenable situation the DCI should be prepared to resign. "The Director cannot be expected to disobey a direct request or order from the President," it noted, "without being prepared to resign."[53]

Here, the Commission noted that:

> the proper functioning of the Agency must depend in large part on the judgment, ability, and integrity of its Director. The best assurance against misuse of the Agency lies in the appointment to that position of persons of such stature, maturity, and integrity that they will be able to resist outside pressure and importuning.[54]

None of the barbs that Helms received during his long gauntlet of investigations irked him more severely than the implications of this observation. As he said on one occasion, "I would like to know what these things were that were solely my responsibility that shows that I lacked in integrity or because I didn't have a large constituency. . . . I wasn't able to stand up to the problem."[55] Certainly, resignation must be recognized as the final sanction that a Director has in defending his Agency and his own integrity, but when one considers the violence that such a resignation would do to the Agency's continuity and orderly administration, it obviously should be invoked only in extremis. The circumstances that Richard Helms confronted were not of that order.

Finally, turning to the Watergate break-in, the Commission concluded that "there is no evidence either that the CIA was a participant in the planning or execution of the Watergate break-in or that it had advance knowledge of it."[56] Nevertheless, looking at CIA's response to post-Watergate investigations, the Commission concluded that the caution displayed in Helms's efforts to "distance" the Agency from Watergate and White House manipulation "cannot be justified by any requirements for secrecy." Ignoring the numerous FBI leaks to the press (admitted by Acting Director Patrick Gray), the Commission criticized CIA for this conduct.[57] Still, the Commission found no evidence that "officers of the Agency actively joined in the coverup conspiracy formed by the White House staff in June 1972."[58] Moreover, except for the suggestion that it

[53] *Ibid*, pp. 192-193.
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] Richard Helms, interview by R. J. Smith, 21 April 1982.
[56] Rockefeller Commission, p. 199.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 202.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 202.

might have been better for Helms to resign than to comply as far as he did to requests that "did not on their face seem improper," the Commission's report dealt fairly with CIA and the DCI.

The Church Committee

The Senate Select Committee To Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities began hearings under the chairmanship of Senator Frank Church early in 1975. Like the Rockefeller Commission, it spread its net wide both in scope and time, and its demands on Ambassador Helms were heavy. Although examining a wide variety of transgressions since the Agency's inception, the Church committee's final report did not mention Watergate, nor did it pursue any of the lines of investigation that previous committees had followed dealing with White House efforts to manipulate the Agency.

In a separate statement to the Church committee's final report, Senator Howard Baker announced his findings from an investigation, which, he said, "I pursued for the most part independently."

> I wish to state my belief that the sum total of the evidence does not substantiate the conclusion that CIA per se was involved in the range of events and circumstances known as Watergate. While the available information leaves nagging questions and contains bits and pieces of intriguing evidence, fairness dictates that an assessment be made on the basis of the present record. An impartial evaluation of that record compels the conclusion that the CIA, as an institution, was not involved in the Watergate break-in.[59]

Although vaguely hedged, this admission from Senator Baker is very close to the vindication that Richard Helms had sought both for himself and for the CIA. Senator Baker's staff had been unable to unearth any evidence to contradict Helms's steadfast insistence that neither he nor his Agency had in any way been involved with the Watergate break-in.

The release of the damaging Nixon tapes in 1974 had revealed how the White House had repeatedly—and unsuccessfully—tried to draw CIA into the coverup. It was not until 1990, however, that former President Nixon finally gave an account of Watergate that both acknowledges that CIA had no role in the break-in and admits that it was a mistake to try to use the CIA to stop the FBI investigation. At the time of his famous "smoking gun" conversation with Haldeman on 23 June 1972, Nixon writes,

> I thought that in view of the fact that some former CIA operatives had participated in the Watergate break-in, the CIA would be concerned that their exposure would, in turn, reveal other, legitimate operations and operatives

[59]Church committee, Book I, p. 608.

> and that the Agency would therefore welcome a chance to avoid that outcome. I thought that would also serve our political interests because it would prevent the FBI from going into areas that would be politically embarrassing to us.[60]

Although Nixon concedes that asking the CIA to intervene was an inexcusable error, "that mistake," he continues, "was mitigated by the good judgment of the Director of Central Intelligence, Richard Helms, and his deputy, Vernon Walters, [who] ignored the White House request and refused to intervene with the FBI, despite the pressure from members of my staff." Nixon argues that, because of this and instructions he gave Haldeman and Ehrlichman later, "No obstruction of justice took place as a result of the June 23 conversation."[61]

For Helms, perhaps the final irony of the whole affair is this exploitation of the DCI's refusal to join in the coverup in Nixon's latter-day efforts to exculpate himself from the charges that forced him to resign from office. At the end of the day, however, DCI Helms had kept CIA clear of the coverup, and the false leads of the Watergate burglary stemming from Howard Hunt's and James McCord's previous service with CIA, the Cuban connection, and all the rest, eventually turned out to be groundless. CIA's hands were clean, as were Richard Helms's.

[60]Richard M. Nixon, *In the Arena* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 34.
[61]*Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

Chapter 9

The Dismissal of Richard Helms

Russell Jack Smith

The Presidential election of 1972 brought a stunning victory for Richard Nixon, an oceanic sweep of all but one state in the Union. Immediately the media proclaimed the result a "Nixon mandate."

Following this smashing success, Nixon resolved to tighten presidential control over the executive branch by imposing upon the traditional Cabinet structure a White House super cabinet headed by four master "counselors" who would each run several departments from the White House. He also determined to sweep out the top leadership and replace it with officers responsive to him.[1] The first step in this process was to obtain the resignations of all senior incumbents, a decision that eventually reached Richard Helms.

Official Washington quickly became aware of the Presidential call for resignations by top officers, but Richard Helms had no intention of resigning. Furthermore, he ordered his DDCI, General Walters, not to do so, either.[2] CIA's leadership had never been considered a political appointment, and Helms did not intend that it should become one. A Democrat, Lyndon Johnson, had appointed him, and a Republican, Richard Nixon, had reappointed him. Helms's predecessor, John McCone, was a Republican appointed by a Democrat, John F. Kennedy. If the President chose to dismiss Richard Helms for whatever reason, that was his option, but Helms did not intend to make it easier for Nixon by resigning.

Helms, however, did not feel vulnerable to dismissal. On election day, he had lunched with Presidential Assistant Alexander Haig, who had counseled the DCI to stay on until after the second Nixon term was well established and then to leave at a time of his own choosing. Helms believed this was a clear indication that Haig, the President's assistant for

[1]Theodore H. White, *Breach of Faith: The Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), p. 222.
[2]Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richards Helms and the CIA* (New York: Knopf, 1979), p. 309.

international affairs and White House overseer of intelligence activities, was not aware of any decision to dismiss him.[3]

Fifteen days after the President had initially requested his top officers' resignations, Helms received notice that he was to meet with Nixon at Camp David. By this time, much of the controversy surrounding the resignations had died down, and Helms assumed that he was going to discuss the upcoming CIA budget. He prepared himself accordingly and on 20 November flew to Camp David in a White House helicopter. After a brief wait, he was ushered into the Aspen House living room, where he found President Nixon by the fireplace, along with Bob Haldeman, who remained to take notes.

According to Helms, after assuring him that he appreciated the good job he had done as DCI, Nixon observed that he was eager to get some new ideas and renewed figures in his new administration and felt that this was going to require some changes. Accordingly, he believed that it was time for CIA to have a new Director and wanted Helms's reaction to this.[4]

Although taken aback, Helms replied that he well understood that he served at the President's convenience and that such changes are to be expected. He went on to say that it was Agency policy to retire people at 60, and that he would soon be reaching that age. The President expressed surprise that Helms was that old and that CIA had such a policy. To Helms it seemed that Nixon now focused—perhaps for the first time—on the fact that dismissal would effectively put an end to Helms's professional career at age 60. At that moment, Helms recalls, Nixon seemed mentally to switch gears and suddenly asked whether Helms would like to be an ambassador.

Again taken aback, Helms replied that he was not at all sure he would like to be an ambassador, adding that it was perhaps time for him to leave the Federal Government and go on and do something else. When Nixon then asked whether Helms might like to be Ambassador to Moscow, Helms suggested that the Russians might take a rather dim view of his presence there. After a thoughtful pause, Nixon agreed and asked where Helms would like to go, hypothetically, if he decided he would like to be an ambassador. Realizing that some answer would be desirable, Helms told the President that, if he were to go as an ambassador any place, he would like to go to Iran. Nixon found this a good idea, noting that he had something else in mind for Joe Farland, the current Ambassador to Iran. He asked Helms to think about the possibility and to let him know what he decided as soon as he could.[5]

[3]Richard Helms, interview by John Bross, 14 December 1982 (hereafter cited as Helms interview by Bross).
[4]*Ibid.*
[5]*Ibid.* DCI Chronological Files record that, during this 20 November Camp David meeting, Helms urged President Nixon to appoint either William Colby or Thomas Karamessines as his successor.

After some desultory further conversation, Richard Helms made his farewell and flew back to Washington. He had been taken by surprise, and his mind was filled with questions. What had changed in Nixon's perception of him in the four years between reappointing him in 1968 and the decision to dismiss him in 1972? Was it dissatisfaction with Helms's performance as DCI? Was it an act of vengeance for his refusal to participate in the Watergate coverup? Was it personal antagonism, especially in the minds of Ehrlichman and Haldeman? Was it all these things in combination or perhaps something else?

If Nixon had been looking for shortcomings in the performance of Richard Helms and the CIA, there was grist for his mill. Nixon had always been critical of CIA estimates, dating back to the "missile gap" controversy of the 1960 election campaign. According to Helms, Nixon in National Security Council meetings:

> would constantly . . . pick on the Agency for not having properly judged what the Soviets were going to do with various kinds of weaponry. And obviously, he was being selective, but he would make nasty remarks about this and say this obviously had to be sharpened up. The Agency had to understand it was to do a better job, and so on.[6]

In Nixon's mind, the culmination of this may have been the SS-9 controversy, when CIA had challenged the Pentagon's views of the missile's capabilities, which supported Defense Secretary Melvin Laird's claim that the Soviets were striving for a "first-strike" capability—a claim that in turn justified the need to develop an ABM system. Nixon held that the CIA had adopted "the McNamara view" of the Soviet Union, which he believed reflected an inadequate understanding of Soviet intentions.

Then there was the Vietnam problem, where CIA seemed always to take the pessimistic side of every judgment bearing on the success of US efforts. The Agency's clear-cut failure to recognize the importance of Sihanoukville as a supply port for Vietnamese materiel and a related failure to appreciate Cambodia as a Viet Cong sanctuary certainly reflected weakness in Nixon's eyes. Similarly, the Nixon White House believed that CIA had underestimated leftist strength in Chile and, despite direct orders from the President, had failed to prevent Allende's rise to power.

Another side of Richard Helms's performance that President Nixon may have considered inadequate was his management of intelligence community affairs. In November 1971, the President had signed an Office of Management and Budget memorandum that James Schlesinger had prepared to strengthen DCI managerial authority over the community. This memorandum conveyed Schlesinger's view that the several intelligence

[6]Richard Helms, interview by R. J. Smith, 21 April 1982 (hereafter cited as Helms interview by Smith).

agencies constituted a group of contending baronies with which Helms was either unable or unwilling to cope. The Presidential order attempted to correct this situation, establish a more integrated community, and achieve lowered costs through greater efficiency. Although from CIA's perspective James Schlesinger knew little of the realities of power relationships among community agencies and of the limitations that this imposed on the DCI, Nixon clearly held Schlesinger and his views in high regard.

With respect to the Watergate affair, Richard Nixon knew that Helms had flatly refused to become a White House ally in dealing with this mess and had skillfully protected CIA from attempts to use it in the coverup. From the Nixon tapes, it appears that early on the President expected Helms to help rescue the White House. "We protected Helms from one hell of a lot of things," Nixon said in approving the scheme to get the CIA to call off the FBI investigation.[7] It is unclear exactly what Nixon had in mind: the only specific instance of such protection that Nixon ever cited was White House assistance in the Agency's effort to prevent publication of a number of passages in Victor Marchetti's book, *CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*. Nixon's remark, nevertheless, seems to reveal a genuine expectation of grateful cooperation. Given the mounting anxiety of the President and his aides over the Watergate affair, it is not difficult to imagine their resentment when CIA's cooperation was not forthcoming.

Still another question in Helms's mind following his Camp David interview with the President was whether personal antagonism had played a part in Nixon's decision. Acknowledging that Nixon sometimes made "nasty remarks," especially about the estimates, Helms was not convinced that any personal antagonism on Nixon's part had triggered the decision to replace him. Nixon's two top aides, Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, were quite another matter. "I was no man for Ehrlichman or Haldeman," Helms later recalled.

> I mean, they didn't like the appointment in the first place. So there was an element around Nixon that was certainly anti-Helms. I mean, it didn't manifest itself with knives in my back, particularly. But, you know, "this guy's not the man for it."[8]

This perception of Haldeman and Ehrlichman is borne out by a remark made by Henry Kissinger to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, himself a former Nixon aide. In early 1973, Moynihan came to Washington on consultation from his post as US Ambassador to New Delhi and had occasion to ask Kissinger, "Why was Helms fired?" Kissinger replied, "I didn't do it. The *Germans* did it."[9] Beyond the sardonic irony of Kissinger, a refugee

[7]Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, p. 334.
[8]Helms interview by Smith.
[9]Daniel P. Moynihan, interview by R. J. Smith, February 1973.

from Nazi Germany, referring to the two Californians as "Germans," the remark has a ring of truth. Helms himself recalls that a day or two after his Camp David meeting, Kissinger was sufficiently in the dark about Helms's dismissal that he asked Helms, "What happened?"[10] Thus, it seems likely that, if anyone besides Nixon played an important part in the decision to dismiss Helms, it was Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

As it happened, Helms had little time to ponder the reasons for his dismissal. A few days after his Camp David visit, Haldeman called to ask whether he had decided to accept the job as Ambassador to Iran. After temporizing for several days, Helms told Haldeman that he would be pleased to accept the post. As he did, he had in mind that he had told Nixon at Camp David that retirement on his 60th birthday, on 30 March, would be in line with CIA policy. Although there was no explicit agreement, Helms thought that he was to stay on as DCI until then.[11] On 21 December, however, Nixon announced James Schlesinger's nomination as DCI. Helms recalls that, when he asked the White House what had happened to the idea of his retiring in March at age 60. the only answer was, "Oh, God, we forgot all about it." So what looked like a plan for him to stay on as DCI until his 60th birthday "turned out in the bureaucratic hurly-burly to have been jettisoned."[12] The Senate confirmed James Schlesinger as Director of Central Intelligence on 23 January 1973, and he was sworn into office on 2 February.

Immediately upon learning of Nixon's choice of a new DCI, Helms had telephoned to congratulate Schlesinger and to offer all possible assistance. In the six weeks between his designation in December and his actual move into the DCI's office in February, however, Schlesinger met with Helms only twice, both pro forma occasions of about 30 minutes each. This seems to have been a deliberate decision on Schlesinger's part, one he perhaps felt was consonant with the President's desire to make a fresh start in national intelligence and to restructure the CIA.

After Richard Helms's departure, the Agency encountered rough sailing. It was a time of acute political turbulence, and by 1975 CIA had become a virtual storm center. Much of the damage that the Agency sustained during this time stemmed from the flood of sensational disclosures that cast CIA in a derogatory light. Judging from Helms's sure-footed performance during his six-year tenure as DCI, it is reasonable to conclude that his judgment and experience could have helped the White House to steer a course that would limit CIA's losses in security as well as reputation. The turbulent and troubled time that followed 1972 stands in stark contrast to the quiet, professional atmosphere that prevailed in CIA during 1966-72, the Richard Helms years.

[10]Helms interview by Bross.
[11]*Ibid.*
[12]*Ibid.*

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Richard Helms as Director of Central Intelligence

"Even more mysterious to most Americans than CIA itself," a 1967 *Time* cover story began, "is its director, Richard McGarrah Helms, 53, an intense, controlled, self-effacing professional who holds one of the most delicate and crucial posts in Washington." This volume in the DCI Historical Series throws new light on a legendary CIA leader. A 1935 graduate of Williams College who served as a foreign correspondent in Europe before World War II, Helms joined the Office of Strategic Services in 1943 and remained in the intelligence profession until he retired 30 years later. Based on full access to CIA's classified records and extensive interviews with Helms and his lieutenants, this book offers an authoritative account of his tenure as Director of Central Intelligence under two presidents. By focusing on those issues and events that most demanded Helms's attention, the authors offer a DCI's view of CIA in its last years as a preeminent Cold War instrument of presidential power.

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